

# **The Fictional Savonarola and the Creation of Modern Italy**

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## Abstract

This thesis deals with Girolamo Savonarola and with his place in the imagination and collective memory of Italians from the early nineteenth century to the present. It examines the works of a variety of Italian fictional authors who turned to Savonarola in the belief that he could help them pursue objectives which, in their opinion, Italy and Italians should strive to achieve. At first, he was called upon by nationalist writers of the Risorgimento to inspire a people and convince it of the need for a free, united Italy. Later, as the new nation began to consolidate and Italians came to realize that unification had not delivered all that it had promised, Savonarola was employed in a negative way to show that military action and force were necessary to ensure Italy's progress to the status of great power. As Italians became more aware of the grave social issues facing their nation, he was called upon, once again, to help change social policy and to remind the people of its civic responsibility to the less fortunate members of society.

The extent of Savonarola's adaptability is also explored through the analysis of his manipulation by the writers of Fascist Italy. Remarkably, he was used to highlight to Italians their duty to stand by Mussolini and the Fascist Regime during their struggle with the Catholic Church and the Pope. At the same time, however, one writer daringly used Savonarola's apostolate to condemn the Regime and the people's blind adherence to its philosophies. As Fascism fell and Italy began to rebuild after the Second World War, there was no longer a need for Savonarola to be used for political or militaristic ends. In recent times, emphasis has been placed on the human side of the Friar and he has been employed solely to guide Italians in a civic, moral and spiritual sense.

From the Risorgimento to the present, the various changes in Italian history have been overshadowed in the treatment of Savonarola by Italian fictional authors who turned to him in difficult times to help define what it is to be Italian.

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## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

My interest in Girolamo Savonarola was first roused nearly ten years ago and, since then, I have become increasingly intrigued with this most controversial of historical figures. This thesis explores the fictional works dealing with Savonarola written by Italian authors. It examines why Savonarola was chosen by these writers and what roles he was called upon to play. My research focuses on how the figure of Savonarola has been manipulated to help shape public opinion, stir a people to action and, ultimately, contribute to the creation of modern Italy. Whilst Savonarola is at the centre of my work, I am, however, primarily concerned with the reasons for his use by Italian fictional authors. These authors specifically chose Savonarola because they felt that he, perhaps better than any other personage in Italian history, could help them to achieve their specific ends. He was cast in a number of unlikely and contradictory roles and it is my conviction that the figure of Savonarola, regardless of the incongruity of his presentation by the authors under examination, has helped to form an Italian national consciousness and to shape Italy's destiny. Whilst my thesis is by no means exhaustive, I have included all fictional works by Italian authors which are known to me. Although it is not within the scope of my work to examine the fictional works dealing with Savonarola written by foreign authors, it is my belief that the study of these works will prove very rewarding, and I hope that they too will be examined in the future.

In the course of my work, I have been assisted by numerous people to whom I owe heartfelt thanks. I would like to acknowledge the authors whom I met in Italy and who so graciously

opened their homes and their minds to me. Gian Pietro Testa, Padre Vincenzo Arnone and Mario Prosperi gave of their time and taught me to appreciate more fully the reasons that had compelled them to bring the figure of Savonarola to life. Whilst in Italy, I also had the pleasure of meeting Padre Davanzati, Padre Verde and Padre Fausto, to whom I am most grateful for the assistance and guidance they provided me.

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I am grateful to the librarians at the Biblioteca Levasti, Biblioteca Nazionale, Biblioteca Viesseux and Biblioteca Marucelliana, all in Florence, for their assistance. I am also most grateful to the staff at the Scholar's Centre at the University of Western Australia who assisted me in accessing the rare material needed for my research. In addition, I would like to thank Graeme Rymill of the Reid Library for his ongoing help in sourcing material.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Italian section in the Discipline Group of European Languages at the University of Western Australia. Specifically, Associate Professor John Kinder for his sage advice and encouragement, and Luciano Pinto for sharing so readily and generously his wealth of knowledge of Italian poetry and theatre with me. Special thanks are reserved for my supervisor, Professor Lorenzo Polizzotto. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to have worked so closely with him over the past years. His knowledge of, and his commitment

to, history and, in particular, Savonarolan history, has not only guided but inspired me. This thesis would neither have been started nor completed without his motivation and unending patience and assistance. He has always afforded me and my work the greatest honesty and respect and I will be forever indebted to him for his counsel, acute criticism and most welcome sense of humour over the past years.

I would like to thank my parents, whose unwavering support and unconditional love has instilled in me the belief that anything can be achieved. This principle has informed every aspect of my life and for that I am truly grateful. Finally, my loving thanks go to my husband David, without whom I would not have been able to pursue my academic dreams. His constant support and his unwavering humour have ensured that I have continued on my path, despite the consuming nature of my task. He has encouraged and supported me through the wonderful vicissitudes and unpredictable course of our lives and has enabled me to be a more complete individual. Above all, he reminds me, through his own boundless ability to adore and appreciate life, of the sheer beauty of existence. This thesis is as much his as it is mine.

## **Note on Language**

The nineteenth-century authors consulted use a type of Italian which may seem strange and incorrect to the modern reader. In quoting from original works used in the thesis, I have not made any changes to the orthography or to the grammar. The most obvious and potentially misleading usages, however, will be denoted by a [sic].

# **Introduction**

Lytton Strachey, famed English author and critic, wrote in *Eminent Victorians* that “teachers and prophets have strange after-histories.”<sup>1</sup> Although he does not refer to the Ferrarese Dominican friar, Girolamo Savonarola, the observation rests well on his shoulders. No other personage in Italian history has evoked such passionate and strikingly differing reactions, both during his lifetime and in the centuries after his death. The Savonarola excommunicated by Pope Alexander VI and condemned to death for heresy, was to be labelled throughout the centuries as both “un eretico e scismatico” and “un campione di ortodossia e maestro di vita.”<sup>2</sup> Even more startling are the political and social roles assigned to him over the ages. Not only has he become, amongst other things, a symbol of Christianity in politico-social and theological realms,<sup>3</sup> but also, as we shall see, an unlikely advocate of fascism. The unusual nature of Savonarola’s legacy has seen him used in support of a dictatorial regime as a champion of rebellion and freedom, of strength and courage. He has been presented as the Church’s arch enemy and as its greatest defender. What makes him endlessly fascinating is his capacity to encompass these descriptions. As I shall discuss, in the hands of various Italian authors, Savonarola has been fashioned and manipulated in order to bring about political and social change and, in so doing, has helped shape modern Italy and modern Italians.

The life of Fra Girolamo Savonarola was characterised by controversy. He evoked passionate reactions both during his turbulent life and after his death, inspiring the unwavering devotion of his followers and the fierce antagonism of his opponents. The debate concerning his motives and the means he employed to have his way, continued to ensure that

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted by Donald Weinstein in *Savonarola and Florence. Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, (Princeton, 1970), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> G. Dore, *Savonarola*, (Rome, 1952), pp. 137-138, as quoted by Eugenio Guccione in ‘Girolamo Savonarola nel pensiero politico-sociale dei cattolici italiani tra il XIX e il XX secolo’, in *Atti della Accademia di scienze lettere e arti di Palermo*, Series, IV, vol. 36, part 2, (Palermo, 1976-1977), p. 254.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 255.

the Friar was not forgotten. During his lifetime (1452-98), and especially in his final eight years, he was an inexhaustible advocate of Church reform and, indeed, he prophesied divine retribution should the Church continue to resist his calls to reject worldly pursuits and reform itself.

Savonarola played a pivotal role in stirring public emotion after the revolt against Piero de' Medici in 1494. His passion and conviction in the pulpit, his plea for the citizens of Florence to abandon their materialistic, hedonistic ways and follow their Lord in pious fashion, soon saw the city divided in its opinion of the Friar of San Marco. His followers, the *piagnoni*, and his antagonists, the *arrabbiati*, denounced each other across the city, and rival groups fought each other in the streets. Savonarola's fame was not contained within Florence. News of his audacious sermons soon spread to Rome and, as his criticisms of the ecclesiastical hierarchy became more and more pointed, he aroused the enmity of the Pope, Alexander VI. Savonarola's refusal to obey the papal demands, his failure to travel to Rome when summoned by the Pope and his continuing attacks on the Church from the pulpit, sealed his fate. As Florence was threatened with interdict if it continued to support the rogue friar, Savonarola endured increasing opposition. The city's administrators, who once supported him, began to turn against him. In the final weeks of his life, as tension and debate increased throughout Florence, the much awaited trial by fire, where many of the Friar's supporters hoped, indeed believed, that Savonarola would miraculously survive the ordeal thus proving his sanctity and the divine origin of his mandate, was cancelled at the last moment. The hopes of his followers were in tatters, his enemies felt they now had proof of his duplicity and Savonarola was imprisoned, together with two of his fellow friars. After repeated questioning and torture, a confession was extracted from him. Savonarola was proclaimed a false prophet and hanged and burned at the stake, with his two brethren, on May 23, 1498.

Savonarola's fame did not end with his death. Indeed, it is fair to say that his death at the stake merely added to his fame and, over the ensuing five centuries, helped to fuel debate which saw him vilified, glorified and mythicised. His death, or martyrdom as his followers believed, ensured that his spirit and ideals were kept alive by devotees until the middle of the sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup> With the invention of printing, the number of people able to read the works of Savonarola increased. Profound devotion for the Friar continued to endure in Florence as Savonarola became the symbol for all those who dreamed of liberty for their city which had once again fallen under Medici control. When the Medici pope, Clement VII, was imprisoned by the imperial troops in 1527, Savonarola was, once again, revered publicly and his cult experienced a revival. San Marco became the centre of the city, both politically and spiritually as it had been in Savonarola's day. This euphoria at the regained liberty was not to last long and once the papal and imperial armies laid siege to, and conquered Florence, the name of Savonarola was again denounced in the city and in the Church.

There continued to be a Savonarolan cult in Florence and elsewhere in Italy.<sup>5</sup> The covert veneration for Savonarola was feeding this cult which the authorities did their best to curb, as it revealed opposition to the established political and religious status quo, and since it represented a threat to papal and Medicean rule. From the middle of the sixteenth century, Savonarola was seen as outside the Church mainstream. This excommunicated Friar, who loudly, and in unrelenting fashion, denounced the papacy and cried for Church reform, who fervently believed in the ideal of Florentine liberty and who openly accused the Church hierarchy of simony and nepotism, was viewed as dangerous and inflammatory. After the Council of Trent, the conformity required by the Church, coupled with the authoritarianism

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<sup>4</sup> Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*, (Oxford, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> See Tamar Herzig, *Savonarola's Women: Visions and Reform in Renaissance Italy*, (Chicago, 2007).

of Spanish domination, dictated that Savonarola was set aside and the reading of his works discouraged, at least in those parts of Italy where Papal and Spanish influence was greatest. Venice, however, was not as influenced by such rule and it is here that the vast majority of Savonarolan works appeared.<sup>6</sup> Outside Italy the publication of the Friar's writings was encouraged. Numerous German editions and translations of his works were released by Protestants as many, influenced by Luther's views, sought to represent Savonarola as precursor of their beliefs.<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, the Friar's devotional works were being printed even in France where his message was to be quite influential for a while.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century, however, Savonarola seems to have been almost forgotten. The only substantial publication about Savonarola and his works published in the seventeenth century was that edited by Jacques Quètif which appeared in 1674 in two volumes.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Friar's memory continued to fade in Italy, kept alive only surreptitiously by fervent supporters. The seeds of revival began to be sown and a small number of apologetic works were published in the second half of the eighteenth century. The first of these works to appear was the sixteenth century biography of Savonarola, attributed to Burlamacchi, which appeared in 1761.<sup>10</sup> Within a relatively short time, an anonymous attack on Savonarola appeared, now known to have been

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<sup>6</sup> From *British Museum General Catalogue of Printed Books*, vol. 213, (London, 1964), between 1530 and 1550, at least 27 Savonarolan works were published in Venice.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, between 1520 and 1560, there were at least 7 Savonarolan works published in Germany.

<sup>8</sup> Stefano Dall'Aglio, *Savonarola in Francia. Circolazione di un'eredità politico-religiosa nell'Europa del Cinquecento*, (Turin, 2006), pp. 399-446, shows that, from 1496 to 1601, there were 59 Savonarolan works published in France.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Quètif (ed.), *Vita Reverendi Patris F. Hieronymi Savonarolae Ferrariensis, Ord. Praedicatorum, and R. Patris F.H. Savonarolae. Epistolae spirituales, et asceticae, nunc primum collectae, et...latine redditae*, 2 vols, (Paris, 1674).

<sup>10</sup> Pacifico Burlamacchi, *Vita del P. F. Girolamo Savonarola dell'Ordine de' Predicatori*, (Lucca, 1761).

written by Rastrelli.<sup>11</sup> Not a year after Rastrelli's work, a reply to it appeared by [Vincenzo Barsanti]. Though an apologetic work, Barsanti's book is the first attempt to construct a coherent biography of Savonarola.<sup>12</sup> Also, in 1782, another apology appeared, written by Guglielmo Bartoli.<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that two of these works, Rastrelli's and Barsanti's, were published anonymously. Bartoli's work, on the other hand, is appended to *The Life of Saint Antonine*, a recognised saint who is made to carry the still highly provocative Savonarola. For although the political climate was changing in Italy, Savonarola was still viewed as suspect and dangerous by the Church and by the civic authorities. His name, so it was felt, could still evoke passionate reactions and, whether favourable or unfavourable, his writings, the authorities feared, could give rise to dissent or discord.

It is not coincidental that these works appeared in the second half of the eighteenth century. The intellectual, political and social climate of Italy was then undergoing a change and the undercurrents of rebellion against the established rulers were beginning to gain momentum. The movement known as the Enlightenment, *Illuminismo*, began to manifest itself in Italy in the 1730s and 1740s and continued to gain strength and following throughout the century. It was a rational movement and was born of a desire to emancipate the population of Europe from the shackles of tradition and authority. As Valsecchi argues, "La potenza innovatrice degli illuministi consiste nella recisa presa di posizione contro i valori tradizionali, su cui si basa l'ordine costituito. L'illuminismo si erge contro il passato, ne combatte l'eredità, in nome del nuovo principio che costituisce la scoperta della nuova filosofia, la Ragione."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Modesto Rastrelli, *Vita del Padre Girolamo Savonarola*. Contains a portrait. (Florence, 1781), p. 131.

<sup>12</sup>[Vincenzo Barsanti], *Della storia del Padre Girolamo Savonarola da Ferrara. Domenicano della congregazione di S. Marco di Firenze*, (Livorno, 1782).

<sup>13</sup> Guglielmo Bartoli, *Istoria dell'Arcivescovo S. Antonino e de' suoi più illustri discepoli, coll'apologia di F. Girolamo Savonarola*, (Florence, 1782), pp. vi, 407.

<sup>14</sup> Franco Valsecchi, *L'Italia nel settecento dal 1714 al 1788*, (n.p. 1971), p. 463.

The Enlightenment sought to overthrow a system bound by privilege, greed and self interest. The fathers of the Enlightenment wanted to banish all rules which were oppressive, regressive and discriminatory and which benefited only the small, wealthy or privileged sections of society.<sup>15</sup> The movement argued that the old, dynastic and customary law rendered it virtually impossible for all members of society to be treated equally and fairly and to have access to justice. It maintained that these laws, which may have served their purpose in the past, were now useless and anachronistic.<sup>16</sup> The champions of the Enlightenment sought, therefore, to change these laws and to remove privilege acquired over the centuries by instituting simple rules and principles born from natural law and based on reason. They fervently believed that only such simple rules would be understood and, therefore, obeyed by everyone.

Since *Illuminismo* was concerned with attacking entrenched authority, it naturally attacked the Church and the papacy, given that both claimed to derive their powers from divine authority and were not, therefore, accountable to anyone for their decisions.<sup>17</sup> Particularly resented was the Church's claim to have a monopoly on truth and thus to have the authority to silence dissenting voices. It is not surprising, therefore, that in this climate of anti-authoritarian reaction and renewal, there should have been an awakening of interest in Savonarola. His anti-authoritarian stance and his calls for reform and renewal now acquired a new meaning and importance. Much admired was his long struggle against the Pope and his determination to disregard the Church's attempt to silence him.

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<sup>15</sup> Elvio Guagnini, *L'età dell'Illuminismo e l'età napoleonica*, (Palermo, 1979), pp. 16-17.

<sup>16</sup> Franco Valsecchi, *L'Italia nel Settecento dal 1714 al 1788*, p. 464.

<sup>17</sup> Elvio Guagnini, *L'età dell'Illuminismo e l'età napoleonica*, p. 17. See also Franco Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment, Studies in a Cosmopolitan Century*, trans. Susan Corsi, (London, 1972) for an interesting discussion on the Italian Enlightenment.

If the Enlightenment discovered Savonarola, it was Romanticism and nationalism which gave him a new fame and raised him to heroic proportions. Romanticism was a very complex movement. In Italy it was, from the very beginning, closely connected with nationalism. Indeed, the early Italian Romantics took upon themselves the mission of serving the nationalistic cause and of engendering nationalism in the masses. Romanticism stressed originality rather than imitation and maintained that each individual had the ability to make a specific contribution to art. The Romantics did not feel tied to conventional forms and their artistic endeavours stemmed from their own beliefs and experiences. The Romantics rejected the rigidity of the Classics and looked to the Middle Ages for inspiration. They turned to the Dark Ages to guide them as they viewed this period as free from the shackles of Classicism. They also rejected *Illuminismo* for its reliance on 'reason' to the exclusion of inspiration and instinct and for its opposition to religion and to individual conscience.

By 1821, articles, inspired by the famous letter of Madame De Staël,<sup>18</sup> began to appear which openly criticised Italians for being too reliant on the classical past and for being unable to draw inspiration from themselves, their history, their circumstances, their own times. They were advised to look outside Italy for inspiration in order to aspire once again to greatness. As debate flared in Italy, the Italian Romantics maintained that literature had to be popular if it was to have any impact on the people. They argued that literature had to address the people's needs and had to speak to the people in a language which was easily understood. They also argued, however, that in order for art to reach the people, the artist had to be aware of what the people were thinking, of their fears, desires and needs. To achieve this end, the artist had to be willing to overcome the divide between the artist and the population.

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<sup>18</sup> Anna Luisa De Staël-Holstein, 'Sulla maniera e l'utilità delle traduzioni', in A. Borlenghi, *La polemica sul Romanticismo*, (Padova, 1968), p. 44.

The Italian Romantics realised that Italians did not share a common past. Apart from their language, they had no common sense of self and, indeed, were characterised by their fragmented past. For these reasons, the Italian Romantics determined that, if they were to have any influence on the people, they had to create a common past. Through literature, music and art, the Romantics endeavoured to create and embellish a national identity of which Italians would be proud and with which they could identify but which, in reality, never existed. The Romantics achieved this by turning to events in Italian history which were embedded in the Italian memory and which stirred emotions of Italian bravery, valour, determination and pride. They looked to Italian military victories and defeats and used them to engender a feeling of shared experience and history. A few historical episodes were particularly favoured and the Romantics presented them again and again in varying forms so as to depict them as symbols of national vices and virtues. In this way, the Romantics were using past events, purposely selected and inverted with a paradigmatic meaning, to create a sense of nationality and thus prepare Italians for future action.

Romanticism was a very flexible tool as it was used by the writers of various countries to give voice to often disparate objectives. Although Italy was by no means the only country to use Romanticism for a particular end,<sup>19</sup> it was, however, unique in that almost all its proponents were concerned with the achievement of a common political goal. From the very beginning, the Italian Romantic movement closely aligned itself with the nationalist cause and remained so committed until the achievement of unification in 1860. The Italian Romantics devoted themselves exclusively to their nationalistic aims. The historical events and characters they portrayed were selected because of their exemplarity and their ability to instil nationalism and patriotism in the people. The historical figures they chose to present as

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<sup>19</sup> See Ferber, Michael, (ed.), *A Companion to European Romanticism*, (Oxford, 2005).

models were individuals who had rebelled against tyranny and injustice and who, in the face of adversity, had not compromised their beliefs and ideals nor had they lost sight of their hopes for a better future for all Italians. Similarly, though negative examples were also selected for treatment, the events that the Romantic writers preferred to depict highlighted the spirit of unity and endeavour, and the courage and valour of the “Italian” people as they strove against oppression and tyranny. These were people and events which foreshadowed and even symbolised what the Romantics regarded as the Italian yearning for independence. These writers concentrated on the rights of the “popolo” and, through their art, they glorified individual liberty as the primary component of national freedom which was the ultimate goal. They believed that national liberty could only be obtained through civil, social and political freedom, and this belief was in direct contrast to French and English Romantic ideals which concentrated above all on intellectual, moral and aesthetic liberty.<sup>20</sup>

As already mentioned, Italian Romantic writers turned to the Middle Ages and later to the Renaissance for inspiration for two reasons. In the first place, they felt that in those periods Italians had been largely free of foreign domination and had been able to display their genius to the fullest. In the second place, they also argued that in this period the Italian people, “un volgo disperso che nome non ha”,<sup>21</sup> had first exhibited nationalistic sentiments. Romantic writers created a feeling of national identity, and forged the spirit which was to lead to the unification of Italy. As the great nineteenth-century critic Francesco de Sanctis wrote: “the study of Medieval history turned against the Restoration and became one of the most effective components of our political regeneration. We searched not for parchments, codices, institutions and the claims to sovereignty of Popes and Emperors, but the traditions and

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<sup>20</sup> Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel*, trans. H & S Michell, (London, 1962), p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Alessandro Manzoni, ‘Adelchi’, in Arcangelo Leone de Castris (ed.), *Tutte le poesie di Alessandro Manzoni*, (Florence, 1965), p. 369.

charter of our own nationality...the image and proof of our own courage and grandeur as a people".<sup>22</sup>

This notion of using past individuals and events to define the present and shape the future is explored in the extensive collaborative work, *Realms of Memory: the construction of the French past*, conducted under the direction of Pierre Nora.<sup>23</sup> This approach to the study of national identity posits that the social and cultural memory of a population is formed by symbolic sites (*lieux de mémoire*.) Nora defines a *lieu de mémoire* as "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community."<sup>24</sup> Such an historic entity must have the capacity for adaptation and reinterpretation since it must be a fluid symbol which is open to use by successive generations to represent their particular ideals. Nora's method of historical analysis, taken up by the Italian writer Mario Isnenghi a few years later,<sup>25</sup> is useful in understanding the treatment of Savonarola at the hands of Italian fictional authors. As my work will argue, Savonarola can be considered, as it were, a *lieu de mémoire*; a symbol that has been afforded many different meanings over time in order to achieve particular goals. This utilisation has been encouraged by the fact that Savonarola had, and continues to have, such a hold on the imagination of Italians.

The Romantics were the first to realise that the figure of Savonarola, with all its drama, heroism and tragedy, had the capacity to resonate loudly with the Italian people. From

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<sup>22</sup> Francesco De Sanctis, *Nuovi saggi critici*, (Naples, 1888), p. 283.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Nora, (ed.), *Realms of Memory: the construction of the French Past*, trans. A. Goldhammer, (New York, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

<sup>25</sup> Mario Isnenghi, *I luoghi della memoria: simboli e dmiti dell'Italia Unita*, 3 vols, (Rome-Bari, 1997). Isnenghi employs the same perspective as Nora, looking at the role of realms of memory in the construction of the national identity, however, Isnenghi only begins his study with the Risorgimento. For further discussions on the notion of nationalism and national identity see Earnest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Oxford, 1983). Also, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, (London, 1983).

European Romanticism, the Italians obtained the notion that history was shaped by exceptional individuals, individuals who stood out against their age. In pursuit of their nationalistic aims, Italian Romantics cast about for heroes who, with their actions, were to instil pride in the population and inspire it to action. With this aim, they turned to Savonarola. In him, they found a hero who stood firm against authority. He was seen, by them, as a great single force who shaped an age by rebelling against tyrannical authority and the pettiness of his own time. The Romantics were inspired by Savonarola. But they also shaped him to the ends they were pursuing. He was a particularly apt example to present to the Italian people because his was a dramatically intense life, marked by controversy, great suffering and martyrdom. They presented him as a defender of personal liberty and of liberty *tout court*. He rebelled against the constituted authorities of his time, which was exactly what the patriots were hoping the Italians would do in their own times. In this way, the Romantics portrayed Savonarola as a symbol of nationalism as well as of patriotism, and they used him to stir the people, unify it and allow it to believe that a unified Italy was not only possible, but essential. The Savonarola of their creation is thus called upon to play a significant role in the unification process and beyond.

The “political,” “nationalist” Savonarola was the discovery of the Italian Romantic period and of the Risorgimento. He stood for the notion that Italians, though enslaved by political and religious powers, had always yearned for freedom. He became the figure of rebellion who, in life, but above all with his death, had remained defiant and had thus shown the way to modern Italians. He was the great hero who stood by his principles and defied authority. This rediscovery of Savonarola culminates with the publication of Villari’s great biography in

1859-61,<sup>26</sup> which had a depth of research not previously seen in works dealing with the Friar. The portrait given by Villari is but the end result of a process of interpretation which had begun years earlier in the period of the struggle for Italian unification. Throughout the Risorgimento, Savonarola was often brought to the people through tragedies and patriotic novels. In this way, a large number of the literate population was exposed to messages of liberty and nationalism which they were asked to pursue, even into martyrdom as Savonarola had done. It was in this climate of early nationalism, where people, places and events were increasingly being portrayed in realistic and empathetic fashion, that the historical novel began to gain popularity in Italy.

The historical novel was born in England and is generally viewed as being fathered by Walter Scott. His work, *Waverley* was begun in 1805 and published in 1814. Scott conveyed the crisis of his own time in historical terms. He “endeavoured to portray the struggles and antagonisms of history by means of characters who, in their psychology and destiny, always represented social trends and historical forces.”<sup>27</sup> The genre he gave life to was accompanied, in England, by “nationalism, industrialisation and revolutionary spirit then on the rise throughout the Continent.”<sup>28</sup> The historical novel frequently drew its protagonists from the middle and even lower classes and, as such, it focused attention on everyday life, on the material conditions of life and on the plight of the people as a whole. Details of day to day life and portrayals of character were often colourful and realistic. In contrast to the episodic narrative of the eighteenth century, the historical novel relied on the use of dialogue. It introduced a defined narrative technique with precise dates, depictions of historical events and characters that were credible and realistic. These factors combined to ensure the

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<sup>26</sup> Pasquale Villari, *Storia di Girolamo Savonarola e dei suoi tempi*, 2 vols, (Florence, 1859-61). When citing from Villari’s biography of Savonarola, the English translation will be used: Pasquale Villari, *The Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola*, trans. Linda Villari, (London, 1923).

<sup>27</sup> Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel*, pp. 34.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-30.

historical novel's appeal to a broad section of the reading community and, in this way, it quickly became a vehicle for social, religious and, more importantly, political statements.<sup>29</sup>

In Italy, the fervent desires of the Italian Romantics to gain popular support for the nationalist movement soon led them to turn to the historical novel, which became the instrument through which they conveyed strong political statements aimed at convincing the people of the need for unification. In order to be effective, the historical novel or tragedy had to be popular. To achieve this end, the historical novel had to entertain the reader and portray, as Manzoni, its most eminent practitioner stated, "a given state of society through facts and characters so similar to reality that one might think one has just come upon a veritable history."<sup>30</sup> It is from this perspective of social and political reform that the Italian Romantic writers looked back to particularly patriotic, exemplary periods in their history. These writers knew that Italians did not share a common past. They knew they had to create a past for the Italian people and, in so doing, forge a national identity of which the people could be proud. Well known writers such as Massimo D'Azeglio and Francesco Guerrazzi, whose works will be discussed, chose specific patriotic events in Italy's past to present to the Italian people as examples for them to follow. The writers were passionate about the cause they espoused, the unification of Italy, and in the historical novel, they found the ideal way to educate a people, mould its beliefs and stir it to action.

The Italian Romantic movement grew in strength throughout the 1820s and 1830s as the ideas of the Risorgimento gained momentum. It was in this climate of political reform, in which historical figures who could be made to embody the spirit of defiance and

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<sup>29</sup> In England, in the 1850s, it was used as a political tool as, for example, it became a medium through which the Oxford Movement and the Catholicism to which it appeared to be leading, were debated.

<sup>30</sup> 'Alessandro Manzoni to Fauriel, Brusuglio, 20 April 1812', in *Epistolario di Alessandro Manzoni*, Giovanni Sforza (ed.), (Milan, 1882), I, p. 214.

independence were being sought, that Savonarola was discovered. At first, it was Savonarola the political reformer, the great man who helped Florence to regain independence and who sought to strengthen it against its enemies, including the corrupt Church which he condemned and wanted to reform. Then, Italians were also given the Guelf Savonarola: the faithful son of the Church concerned only for its welfare who relied on his teachings to improve firstly the political and secondly the social conditions of Italians. The modern followers of the Guelf Savonarola or *New Piagnoni*,<sup>31</sup> aspired to a new Italy in terms of both political reform, and the spiritual rebirth of its people.

The changing political and social situation in Italy required a new Savonarola. Post unification writers used him to interesting effects. The writers of Liberal Italy turned to Savonarola in order to address the myriad problems facing the newly formed nation. However, their motives were not uniform and we see the Friar manipulated to achieve vastly different ends. At first, he is used negatively by some writers to present an agenda of militarism to Italians. These writers argue that much as an unarmed Savonarola had failed in his mission, so an unarmed Italy could only expect to meet with defeat and humiliation. Savonarola's determination to eschew force and rely solely on spiritual armaments is then rejected since its consequences will be disastrous for Italy. Later, however, as Italy's social problems became more and more apparent, the writers, influenced by the historical presentations of scholars such as Villari and Marchesi, turn to the Friar's humanity, and use him as an exemplar of civic and moral virtue and of individual responsibility.

However, this rediscovery of the human Savonarola was to be short lived as Fascism cast its shadow over the young nation. The rapidity with which Fascism took hold, the strength of its

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<sup>31</sup> For a further discussion on the *New Piagnoni*, see Giovanni Gentile, *Gino Capponi e la cultura Toscana nel secolo decimonono*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Florence, 1926), pp. 178-212.

ensorship laws and the sheer magnetism of Mussolini, ensured that the publications dealing with Savonarola during this period would be, at least on the surface, ratifications of the Regime. This period saw the publication of a small, but highly interesting and important collection of works which, to varying degrees, used Savonarola to shape public opinion, urging Italians to rethink the relationship between Church and State and, in so doing, support Mussolini and the political system he had created. When the war finished and Fascism finally fell, Italians were once again confronted with the task of rebuilding their nation. Although after World War II Savonarola is no longer used as a political tool, he is engaged by the modern writers to suggest solutions to the social problems facing late twentieth century Italy. Through their presentation of Savonarola, these writers encourage Italians to examine themselves and strive to achieve a higher degree of social and civic awareness.

Despite the differences in his treatment, the authors discussed in this work shared a desire to use the figure of Savonarola to stir the Italian people, effect change and ultimately shape a nation. What I seek to analyse in this thesis is how and why Savonarola was used by so many different people to bring about such varied ends. Indeed, it is not the scope of my work to look at, examine or study the historical Savonarola. Rather I will examine the imaginary Savonarola and seek to explore the diverse roles he was called upon to play in forging a new nation and in creating a new Italy and new Italian people.

## **Chapter 1**

# **Savonarola and the Risorgimento**

## I

The writers of the Risorgimento, as mentioned in the previous section, sought to create a sense of collective Italian identity by retelling and embellishing past events and manipulating historical figures to have them serve as examples for the divided and oppressed Italians of the Restoration. It was hoped that the heroic deeds of the past would fire contemporary Italians to work together and realise the possibility of, and need for, a unified Italy. Somewhat surprisingly, Girolamo Savonarola was one of the few figures of the Renaissance to be mobilised to advance the cause of Italian nationalism. In this section, I will examine three important fictional works in which Savonarola is presented as an exemplar of civic virtues, defender of liberty and precursor of Italian unity. These works are *L'assedio di Firenze* by Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi, published in 1836; *Niccolò de' Lapi ovvero i palleschi e i piagnoni*, by Massimo D'Azeglio, published in 1841, and *I piagnoni e gli arrabbiati* by Giuseppe Revere, published in 1843.<sup>1</sup> I will also look briefly at another, less well known and less influential work, *Francesco Valori. Dramma storico*, by Ermolao Rubieri, published in 1845.<sup>2</sup> It is important to mention that two of the four writers, Guerrazzi and D'Azeglio, are amongst the two most popular and widely read authors of the nineteenth century. They are also of capital importance both for their role in the Risorgimento and in the way they advocated unification. For these reasons, I believe their works deserve greater attention than the works of the writers that follow.

Before analysing the works in detail, however, it is essential to examine, first, Savonarola's political and religious views and the part he played in shaping the political landscape of late fifteenth century Italy, but also the early nineteenth-century notion of what it meant to be

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<sup>1</sup> F.D. Guerrazzi, *L'assedio di Firenze*, 2 vols, (Milan, 1928). Massimo D'Azeglio, *Niccolò de' Lapi ovvero i palleschi e i piagnoni*, in *Romanzi*, (Milan, 1966). Giuseppe Revere, *I piagnoni e gli arrabbiati al tempo di Fra Girolamo Savonarola*, (Milan, 1843). Note that I will also refer to D'Azeglio's and Revere's works by their short titles: *Niccolò de' Lapi* and *I piagnoni e gli arrabbiati*.

<sup>2</sup> Ermolao Rubieri, *Francesco Valori. Dramma storico*, (Florence, 1848).

Italian. Equally important is the examination of his posthumous reputation up to, and including, the siege and capitulation of Florence in 1529-30, since two of the works under analysis are set in the period of the second Florentine republic.<sup>3</sup> Only then will we be in a position to assess the extent of the transformation wrought on the figure of the historical Savonarola by the four writers under discussion. More importantly, the comparison between the historical and the fictional Savonarola will enable us to determine why he was chosen by the writers as an exemplar, and how they hoped to use his figure to help create a new, free nation.

Savonarola's early apostolate in both Florence and Northern Italy was unremarkable. He began to attract attention only after his return to Florence in 1490 when he preached on the corruption of the Church and on the inevitable and imminent approach of terrible divine chastisement because of the moral degeneration of mankind. During this period he criticised the actions of earthly rulers in general for neglecting their duties to their subjects.<sup>4</sup> Up until the French invasion of 1494, Savonarola had shown little interest in politics and had not spoken on the type of government he felt was needed for Florence. As the French army approached Florence, he and four other citizens were sent on an embassy to Charles VIII on 5 November to plead for mercy. Piero de' Medici, the hapless first citizen in Florence, was forced by a popular riot to flee Florence on 9 November. Once the French army departed from the city, the Florentines turned to the task of finding an acceptable political settlement. Savonarola had become convinced that Florence had been spared from French vengeance because it was God's chosen city, and in his sermons beginning on 7 December, he began to

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<sup>3</sup> Guerrazzi's *L'assedio di Firenze* and D'Azeglio's *Niccolò de' Lapi* are set during the siege of 1529- 1530, whereas Revere's *I piagnoni e gli arrabbiati* and Rubieri's *Francesco Valori*, are set during Savonarola's lifetime.

<sup>4</sup> See Donald Weinstein's groundbreaking work, *Savonarola and Florence, Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, (Princeton, 1970), pp. 247-261, for a brilliant discussion and examination of these sermons. See also Benedetto Varchi, *Storia Fiorentina*, vol. I, (Florence, 1838-1841), pp. 126, 158, 168. See also Pasquale Villari's biography, *The Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola*, (London, 1923), pp. 173-190.

prophesise that Florence was to become all powerful and lead Christianity to the Millennium. To ensure that God's will would be fulfilled, Savonarola began to intervene in Florentine politics by joining the calls for constitutional reform.<sup>5</sup> He preached that the current form of government was in need of change and,<sup>6</sup> from that point, his sermons became increasingly political as he described and explained the form of government he felt was needed for Florence. He was by now held in high regard by the Florentines who looked upon him as a prophet. He argued that Florence should never again be ruled by one man alone,<sup>7</sup> and called for a popular government that would prevent the establishment of tyranny with all its attendant excesses and corruption, both civic and moral. Even though he did not hold a political position, it is clear that he played a pivotal role in the establishment of the new system of government centred on the Great Council since drafts of the new constitution would be put to him for his opinion,<sup>8</sup> though the initiative for the constitutional revolution was always held by members of the Florentine oligarchy. On 22 and 23 December, the enabling legislation for the establishment of the *governo popolare* was passed.

Savonarola took an almost proprietorial attitude towards the new government as he knew that the social and religious reforms he had been advocating from the pulpit needed a government which would be conducive to his agenda.<sup>9</sup> He opposed, both from the pulpit and through his

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<sup>5</sup> Nicolai Rubinstein, 'Savonarola on the Government of Florence in *The World of Savonarola, Italian elites and perceptions of crisis*, edited by S. Fletcher & C. Shaw, (Ashgate, 2000), p. 45. Rubinstein states that Savonarola's *piagnoni* biographers earlier affirmed that he had preached on politics earlier than December of 1494. He makes the distinction between political sermons dealing with constitutional reform, and sermons which addressed social issues such as poverty and charity, two themes one would expect to see recurring in the sermons given by a member of an Observant convent.

<sup>6</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, edited by L. Firpo, *Prediche sopra Aggeo con il Trattato circa il reggimento e governo della città di Firenze*, (Rome, 1965), p. 226: 'La forma che avete principiata non può stare, se non la riordinate meglio', in N. Rubinstien, 'Savonarola on the government of Florence', *The World of Savonarola, Italian elites and perceptions of crisis*, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, p. 132; see also Nicolai Rubinstein, 'Savonarola on the Government of Florence', p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Roberto Ridolfi, *The Life of Girolamo Savonarola*, (London, 1959), pp. 91-95. Also, J.N. Stephens, *The Fall of the Florentine Republic, 1512-1530*, (Oxford, 1883), p.30.

<sup>9</sup> L. Polizzotto, 'Savonarola and the Florentine Oligarchy', in *The World of Savonarola, Italian Elites and Perception of Crisis*, p. 57.

followers in the Great Council, any attempt to reform it or to alter its salient features. He also supported Florence's abandonment of the Italian League and the city's alliance with France, a decision which was much resented by the other Italian states, including the Papacy. For this reason and also for his sermons which were highly critical of the corruption of the Church, Savonarola soon aroused the displeasure of Pope Alexander VI. The Pope tried in vain to silence him, being forced eventually to resort to excommunication. Savonarola was silenced for a few months. However, moved by his sense of duty to complete the mission entrusted to him by God, he returned to the pulpit in 1498. Though tinged with foreboding, his message was unchanged. He called for the reforms that would usher in the Millennium and criticised the Italian powers and the papacy for obstructing the will of God. Angered by this further challenge to his authority, Alexander VI demanded that Savonarola be silenced, threatening Florence with interdict should it fail to do so. This time there was no turning back. The Florentines, frightened by the Pope's threat, arrested Savonarola and, after subjecting him to torture and to a series of trials, executed him on 23 May 1498.

Savonarola's teaching was kept alive by his followers, the *piagnoni*, who sought with some success to have his policies implemented by the Florentine republic. The *piagnoni* kept on advocating Savonarola's reform even after the return of the Medici to Florence in 1512. *Piagnoni* and an heterogeneous alliance of anti-Mediceans took control in 1527 when the Medici were expelled once again and a new republican government was installed in Florence. The republic of 1527-1530 was Savonarolan in spirit. The republican leaders were inspired by him and his ideas played a major role in the establishment of the government and in its decisions.

Thereafter, Savonarolan ideals of virtue and liberty, moreover, strengthened the Florentines' resolve to fight for the city's freedom and to prevent it from falling under tyrannical rule.<sup>10</sup> In 1512, the republic's defences were poor and the Medici were returned to power relatively easily. The Florentines of the Second Republic learned from that mistake and, in 1529, they mobilised a strong mercenary force and an enthusiastic citizen militia to oppose the papal and imperial forces heading towards Florence. Indeed, Michelangelo Buonarroti, took up its defence and oversaw the strengthening of the city's fortifications. The siege of Florence lasted for 10 months, during which time thousands of lives were lost in battle and many more perished of hunger and disease. Although the republicans fought bravely and tirelessly, filled with the sole desire to see their beloved city remain free, their efforts were in vain and the city fell on 12 August, 1530. The imperial armies lost 14000 men during the siege, almost half their total numbers, and the republicans lost 8000 during the battles. It is estimated that the total death toll in Florence and its environs, as a result of the prolonged battle, was more than 36000 people. It is important to note that the city fell not solely as a result of military defeat, but also through the treachery and deceit of the mercenary forces and of the many Florentines who betrayed their city for personal gain. The siege of Florence was soon to be viewed by Florentine historians<sup>11</sup> as a wonderful example of Italian military valour. The city inspired by Savonarolan ideology stood against the Papacy and the Spanish and German Imperial forces. It was also seen, however, as an example of the inevitable humiliation which awaited a people divided in itself and beset by treachery and defeatism.

It is interesting to consider how Savonarola, the defender of Florentine liberty, came to be used as a symbol of the values and ideals of the Risorgimento. Savonarola, as we have seen,

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<sup>10</sup> Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation. The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*, (Oxford, 1994), chapter 1.

<sup>11</sup> In particular, Benedetto Varchi, with his work, *Storia Fiorentina*, and Iacopo Nardi's work, *Istorie della città di Firenze*, (Florence, 1838-1841).

was concerned only for Florence; he thought only in terms of Florentine glory and was opposed to the Italian League. Florence, its religious and social reform, its liberty, were his sole preoccupations and he did not concern himself with the greater issues facing Italy during his times. He was totally in favour of the arrival of the French, which placed him and Florence at odds with the views of the papacy and of most of the rulers in Italy, with the exception of Ludovico il Moro. Yet it is this very same man who was presented to the people during the Risorgimento as a symbol of freedom and liberty. In order to explore how this happened and why Savonarola was chosen, we now turn to the writers under examination.

## II

The writers to be discussed belonged to the Italian Romantic movement which was integral to the Risorgimento. These writers took it upon themselves to bring a divided people together by instilling in them a sense of pride in their nation and igniting in them a revolutionary flame. One of the major figures of the Italian Romantic and, indeed, Nationalist movement was the author, politician and patriot, Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi (1804-1873). Born in Livorno to “gente antica”,<sup>12</sup> he established himself, from an early age, not only as a novelist, but as a man of politics. Indeed, most of his literary works were written as weapons to be used in the battle for the independence of Italy. His literary career, moreover, went hand in hand with his political aspirations and established him as one of the most important patriots in the early stages of the Risorgimento. Guerrazzi was heavily involved in politics throughout his life. Although he was exiled on three occasions as punishment for his revolutionary views, he maintained a strong and powerful political presence. He was very active in the social and political upheavals of 1847-1849 and became a minister and then a

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<sup>12</sup> He refers to his family as ‘gente antica’ in his memoirs, *Note autobiografiche e poema*, edited by R. Guastalla, Florence, 1899, which he wrote at the unusually young age of 29. For further discussion, see Ernesto Sestan’s excellent essay ‘Guerrazzi e il memorialismo Toscano’, in *Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi nella storia politica e culturale del Risorgimento*, edited by Simonetta Soldani, (Florence, 1975), pp. 24-65.

dictator of Tuscany in the government established during this time. He played a major role in the politics which led to the formation of the Italian state in 1861 and continued to be a member of the Italian parliament until 1870.

Guerrazzi's views on foreign oppression, especially as exercised by Austria, earned him powerful enemies, and he was exiled in 1831. It was during this period of exile south of Siena, that Guerrazzi met the influential patriot, Giuseppe Mazzini. Guerrazzi did not become involved in the activities of the clandestine political societies, as Mazzini probably would have liked, but it is fair to assume that Mazzini's political views, his nationalistic aims, influenced Guerrazzi and strengthened his own revolutionary ideas. Since Mazzini's view that "the state is embedded in the moral consciousness of the people and that education and religious faith are essential in the construction of national identity,"<sup>13</sup> in part echoed Savonarolan ideology, it is not difficult to see that Guerrazzi would have been influenced by Mazzini's admiration of the Friar and dedicated, just as Mazzini had been, to the "goal of reviving this historical representative of patriotism and moral reform in the Italian mind."<sup>14</sup> However, before Guerrazzi decided to bring the Savonarolan memory to life in his work, he had already established himself as a popular author and influential patriot. This notoriety helped to ensure that his greatest patriotic work, *L'assedio di Firenze*, written during his exile in 1831, would be met with wide public interest.

In Guerrazzi's first historical novel, *La Battaglia di Benevento*, which he wrote at the age of 22,<sup>15</sup> as in much of his later work, the romantic influence of Byron, whom he met whilst studying law in Pisa, is quite evident. The tone is heavy and laden with violent and evocative

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Fulton, 'Savonarola's Risorgimento, Images of the Prophet from Nineteenth-Century Italy', in *Una città e il suo profeta. Firenze di fronte al Savonarola*, edited by Gian Carlo Garfagnini, (Florence, 2001), p. 523.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 523.

<sup>15</sup> F.D. Guerrazzi, *La Battaglia di Benevento*, (Turin, 1857).

imagery and the author infuses the novel with a realism which invites the reader to participate fully in the story set in the thirteenth century. Throughout the novel, Guerrazzi is calling on his fellow countrymen to come together and create a new and free nation. He uses the past to reignite a sense of patriotism in the present in order to shape the future:

I nostri passi sono su la polvere de' grandi ... i passi di noi più meritevoli di andare sepolti sotto la polvere!<sup>16</sup>

A little later, Guerrazzi warns his readers that the actions they undertake will resonate for centuries to come: “Il delitto di questo secolo stimarono e stimeranno il delitto dei secoli futuri?”<sup>17</sup> By “delitto”, one could assume he is referring to the crime committed by nineteenth-century Italians in failing to work together, to persevere in the face of adversity and to strive gallantly to realise the dream of a unified and free Italy. Interestingly in this work, Guerrazzi implores his readers not to forget the fall of the second Florentine republic on 12 August, 1530, by saying: “Oh! Non dimenticherò mai il giorno dodicesimo di agosto.”<sup>18</sup> In so doing, he is using an event which took place three centuries before to instruct his audience. He is asking his readers to be inspired by the bravery and valour of the republican fighters and is highlighting the dire consequences of not working together to achieve a greater aim.

Guerrazzi believed, as did many of his contemporaries, that the Peninsula could only be unified through the will and defiance of the people. He and his fellow patriots were convinced that a *new* Italy needed to be formed of *new* Italians. The inhabitants of the Peninsula had to be convinced to think of themselves as ‘Italians’ and had to be instilled with a sense of pride in their nation and with a feeling that simple virtues such as honesty and self-

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

sacrifice were essential if a great and free nation was to emerge. For Italy to become a unified nation, the notion of *italianità* had to be accepted by the people.<sup>19</sup> Italians had to turn against foreigners and they needed to be convinced that a system of self-determining government was essential. In turn, this meant that they needed to behave in a more patriotic, ethical and social way. The revolution which they were working towards and which was to extend to the whole nation, had to begin with a change in the character of the people. For this reason, Guerrazzi and other nationalist writers set their stories in a popular milieu. But why did Guerrazzi and later D'Azeglio choose the siege of Florence to carry their nationalistic message to the people? What was the siege of Florence and how was it used to bring a nation together more than 300 years after the event? More importantly, what was Savonarola's role in the siege of Florence and how was he used by these novelists to further their own aims?

It is not merely the career of Savonarola which Guerrazzi uses to inspire his readers. The collective, popular nature of the struggle in 1529-1530 is crucial to the author as he works to stir his contemporaries to action and make them understand that great change can come about only through cooperation and the collective will and courage of the people. The republican fighters, as presented by Guerrazzi, are inspired by Savonarola to have loftier ideals and be guided by his strong, ethical principles. The struggle presented in *L'assedio di Firenze* entailed more than political and military resistance. It also encompassed a programme of ethical renewal for the population. The battle of 1529-1530 was not merely waged to save Florence from foreign rule. It was a campaign for political, military and social rebirth. In this way, it is presented to the Italians of the nineteenth century as a struggle which relied on an improvement in both the personal and private behaviour of Florentines, civilians and soldiers alike. The Republicans constantly sacrifice their private needs for the greater good of their

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<sup>19</sup> For further examination of the notion of the nationalisation of a people, see George L. Mosse, *The Nationalisation of the Masses*, (New York, 1975), pp. 1-20, 183-206, 207-216.

homeland. They are prepared to lose everything: their families, their fortunes and their lives, in order to ensure that Florence does not, once again, fall under foreign rule. Through their struggle, Guerrazzi is showing his contemporaries in Italy how to behave. In the novel, the struggle for Florentine freedom highlights the valour and courage of a population which has rejected Medicean tyranny, papal corruption and foreign rule and is now fighting to preserve its freedom. These fighters are waging a war spurred by principles which Savonarola had instilled in them decades before and the Friar's spirit, his political and religious views, are presented throughout the novel as the guiding principle of the besieged.

During the 1820s and 1830s the historical novel became a well-respected and important part of Italian literature. Manzoni paved the way with *I promessi sposi*, first published in 1827 and, in 1836, Guerrazzi published his well-received *L'assedio di Firenze* under the pseudonym Anselmo Gualandi.<sup>20</sup> The novel was met with great enthusiasm and it is estimated that from 1836 until 1915, thirty editions of the novel were published which equates to approximately one edition every two and a half years.<sup>21</sup> Since Guerrazzi's novel could be used only as a powerful nationalistic tool if it were actually read by Italians, the fact that it was in such demand suggests that it played an important role in bringing the people of the Peninsula together, uniting them in a common cause. *L'assedio di Firenze* is a rich, complicated novel in which history predominates and the main characters are historical figures. The novel is well researched and Guerrazzi relies heavily on history by the Florentine author and historian, Benedetto Varchi, (1503-1565). Guerrazzi closely studied Benedetto's *Storia Fiorentina* which deals with the city's history from 1527 to 1538. He also

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<sup>20</sup> Sergio Romagnoli, edited by Simonetta Soldani, 'Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi e il romanzo storico', in *Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi nella storia politica e culturale del Risorgimento*, (Florence, 1975), p. 93 tells us that it was first published in Paris as does Ferrara in *Nuova Bibliografia Savonaroliana*, (Vaduz, 1981), p. 14. However, it may well be that it was published in Italy but, in order to avoid persecution for the publishing house due to the strong nationalistic theme and revolutionary message of the novel, the publisher named Paris as the place of publication.

<sup>21</sup> Sergio Romagnoli, 'Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi e il romanzo storico', p. 93.

would have been familiar with the work by Iacopo Nardi (1476-1563), *Istorie della città di Firenze*, which deals with the city's history from 1498 to 1537.<sup>22</sup>

*L'assedio di Firenze*, with its florid language and its scenes which are, at times, complicated and confusing, is not as easily read as D'Azeglio's *Niccolò de' Lapi*. However, despite its intricacies, it is an interesting, melodramatic tale, full of wonderful imagery and compelling sub-plots which ensured its success. The battle scenes are described vividly and often in minute detail, and the secondary stories which are told in the novel are offered in sensational and lyrical fashion. Guerrazzi fills his novel with myriad, believable characters whose stories combine to produce a dramatised view of a great historical event. The characters in the novel are realistically presented and they have the attributes and deficiencies of every human being. It is this sense of realism found in many of the novel's protagonists that elevates the work, rendering it widely popular and ensuring it does not become too weighed down in historical detail.

*L'assedio di Firenze* deals with the events leading up to the fall of the second Florentine republic on 12 August, 1530. The siege is seen through the eyes of the novel's protagonists whose lives, in accordance with Romantic literary principles, are presented as microcosms of the greater situation. Guerrazzi beautifully establishes parallels between the public life of Florence in the siege and the private life of his characters. The novel opens with the returned exile Luigi Alamanni, who hears the dying words of Niccolò Machiavelli. Machiavelli's long speech serves not only to show his own state of mind and his love for his homeland and his desire for freedom, but to set the tone for the rest of the novel and give us a brief picture of the political landscape of 1527. He pleads with his fellow Florentines to fight to maintain

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<sup>22</sup> Iacopo Nardi, *Istorie della città di Firenze*.

the liberty of their city and declares that they must rely only on themselves and band together in order to ensure that the city remain free:

Noi siamo soli. E che perciò? Dobbiamo noi forse piangere come perduta la nostra città? Non è mai lecito disperare della salute della Patria, insegnava Focione .... Voi giovani, nei quali tutta speranza di salute riposa, restringetevi insieme; voi Zanobi e Luigi, consigiate i nobili; voi Dante da Castiglione, adoperatevi fra i popolani; badate a non lasciarvi sedurre dalle antiche rinomanze; a' casi nuovi convengono uomini nuovi ... confido non poco nella fortuna, nella provvidenza di Dio moltissimo, il quale non soffrirà la rovina della innocente mia Patria.<sup>23</sup>

Through Machiavelli, Guerrazzi is appealing to his readers. The patriotic tone of the novel is established at the very beginning and the author, by use of his own literary weapon, is calling his compatriots to arms. His readers would have readily identified with Machiavelli, famous man of the Renaissance, author and politician. When Machiavelli declares his love for his *patria*: “ Il mio cuore non conobbe altro palpito che per la Patria,”<sup>24</sup> it is as though the author is pleading with all Italians to commit themselves to the nationalistic cause and put the common good above their own needs. Characters such as Niccolò Machiavelli and Luigi Alamanni, although not *piagnoni*, are anti-papal, against foreign power and fierce republicans and they are conditioned by Savonarolan ideology. These men are supporters of the *popolo* and are therefore seeking the *popolo's* welfare.<sup>25</sup> As such, all the light of the novel falls on characters such as these as Guerrazzi makes it very clear that there is no room for ambivalence in the struggle for freedom.

When Machiavelli entrusts his son, Vico, to the great republican soldier, Francesco Ferruccio, we feel that the spirit of liberty and freedom is being passed on from one generation to the

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<sup>23</sup> F.D. Guerrazzi, *L'assedio di Firenze*, vol. I, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> See L. Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation*, p. 361.

next. Machiavelli pleads with Ferruccio to take his son with him into battle so that the struggle may be won. Indeed, he declares that death is preferable to living in a city which is not free:

... egli è mio sangue; stendete la mano, ecco io vi depongo sopra le facultà che mi concesse la natura di benedirlo, quando mi salutarono padre; voi non avete figliuolo ... ed egli è figlio infelice di padre infelicissimo; amatelo, amatelo, dopo la Patria primo: ed accettando poi il sacro deposito, Niccolò Machiavelli vi scongiura che operiate in maniera, che o egli possa al vostro fianco salvare la Patria, o morire gloriosamente per lei.<sup>26</sup>

The notion of death over dishonour pervades *L'assedio di Firenze* and its heroes pay a heavy price for their devotion to their cause. Many die in the battle for freedom, sons are killed, fortunes are lost and homes are destroyed. Machiavelli's gesture is grand: he is willing to sacrifice his own son and it is this high sense of morality and selflessness which Guerrazzi wants his readers to aspire to. In addition to Machiavelli's strong republican views, he also speaks of the corruption of the Church. He is anti-papal, against the Medici tyrants and realises that Florentines must think and act very differently if they are to save their city. He espouses the notions of valour, courage, steadfastness and intransigence in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. These views are echoed by Luigi Alamanni and Zanobi Buondelmonte in the opening pages of the novel and clearly establish that, although they are not *piagnoni*, they are definitely inspired by Savonarolan ideology.<sup>27</sup>

The novel's action moves quickly and dramatically as Guerrazzi takes us to Arezzo where Ferruccio is defending the city against the imperial and papal armies. Ferruccio's character and strength of spirit is established early as we are presented with a brave man and an example of a virtuous *popolano* but also a military leader. In these early stages, Guerrazzi

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<sup>26</sup> F.D. Guerrazzi, *L'assedio di Firenze*, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> See novel for examples. *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 12-29.

introduces most of his principal characters and quickly portrays them as either villains and enemies of the republican cause or heroic proponents of it. Although the novel essentially deals with the military aspect of the siege, Guerrazzi needed to instruct his readers on a number of levels. His aim was to teach them to strive for an improvement in their moral, spiritual and ethical behaviour. For this reason, the siege is also seen through the eyes of a number of different characters and, in addition to contributing to the popular nature of the novel, they serve as either examples to be emulated or to be rejected. The love story between the virtuous Annalena and the honourable Vico contrasts well with the actions of the villains, Malatesta Baglioni and his sidekick, the appropriately named Cencio. The words and actions of the prophet and *piagnone* Pieruccio, together with the selfless and brave nature of the Dominican friar Fra Benedetto, are cleverly set against the corruption and tyranny of the Pope and the self serving nature of the scorned Giovanni Bandini who betrays his city for personal gain. The love story of Vico di Niccolò Machiavelli and Annalena, the famous duel between Giovanni Bandini and Ludovico Martelli over the love of Maria dei Ricci,<sup>28</sup> and the reunion of Annalena with her father, Lucantonio, all showcase Guerrazzi's storytelling abilities. Throughout the novel, treachery is the enemy and the heroes are made to shine, highlighting that the city, and by extension a nation, can only be saved through the collective will and rebirth of a people.

*L'assedio di Firenze's* narrative is rich, drawing on many of the techniques which characterised the genre of the historical novel. The true protagonist of the novel is Florence, the true heroes are Savonarola (although seldom mentioned by name) and his followers who understood that Florence deserved to be free and that it needed to rid itself of corruption and tyranny to achieve its full potential and realise its destiny. Savonarola's memory is truly alive as his followers, the *piagnoni*, are fighting to save the Republic which is, in essence,

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<sup>28</sup> See Agostino Ademollo's *Marietta de' Ricci, ovvero Firenze al tempo dell'assedio*, 5 vols, (Florence, 1845).

Savonarolan. Although Savonarola's spirit is felt strongly throughout the novel, Guerrazzi relies more heavily on Savonarola's political views and ideals than on his religious message. Guerrazzi, like many of his fellow patriots, wanted a lay, anti-clerical, republican Italy to emerge.<sup>29</sup> He sat to the extreme left of government and his political life was characterised by his Jacobin views. He drew inspiration from the Enlightenment and from the French revolution<sup>30</sup> which adopted reason as the new guiding deity and saw religion rejected. The Savonarolan republic, however, was essentially a religious one, with Christ as supreme ruler. In *L'assedio di Firenze*, however, Guerrazzi focuses primarily on his political agenda, on his criticisms of the papacy and of tyrannical rule and on his call for a moral rebirth of the people. His ambivalent treatment of Savonarola's religious message is best seen in his portrayal of Pieruccio and Fra Benedetto da Foiano, the two Savonarolan figureheads in the novel. Historically, very little is known about Pieruccio apart from the fact that he was a *popolano* who cared for the city's poor.<sup>31</sup> What is clear in Guerrazzi's treatment is that he is portrayed as a strong patriot with a visceral love for Florence:

Firenze, tu sei la madre mia: - potessi salvarti col mio sangue, non mi parrebbe essere uscito in questo mondo invano! Un tuo figlio snaturato si muove ai tuoi danni, e le genti lo venerano vicario di Dio su questa terra: - io ti disseterei col mio sangue, e la gente mi chiama pazzo! ... non importa; - potessi almeno salvarti!<sup>32</sup>

It is Pieruccio who speaks of betrayal when he predicts that Florence will fall at the hands of traitors. Early in the novel, he declares that it is the flame of betrayal which will ignite the fires that will ruin Florence,<sup>33</sup> and, when asked who the traitors are, he replies: 'io veglio, -

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<sup>29</sup> In his work, *Risorgimento e Protestanti*, (Naples, 1956), Gioio Spini offers an interesting discussion of the many factors which combined to make Guerrazzi champion a lay, free Italy.

<sup>30</sup> Nicola Badaloni, 'Il pensiero politico di F.D. Guerrazzi', in *Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi nella storia politica e culturale del Risorgimento*, pp. 67-90.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion on Pieruccio, see Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation*, pp. 244, 346-348.

<sup>32</sup> F.D. Guerrazzi, *L'assedio di Firenze*, vol. II, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 270.

gli saprai più tardi'.<sup>34</sup> It is much later in the novel when he says: 'Il tradimento c'inviluppa nelle sue spire, come il serpente dell'Apocalisse', that he reveals who the traitors are:

Dei traditori ch'io conosco, e qui verranno quando la campana dei Priori avrà battuto mezza notte: io gli ho ascoltati, essi favellavano del Papa, del Malatesta e dei maggiori cittadini di Fiorenza; convenuti ormai nel tradimento, e pare che non si accordino sul prezzo o sul modo.<sup>35</sup>

Pieruccio not only openly criticises the Pope and accuses some of the principal citizens of Florence of betraying their city, but in so doing, conveys one of the most important elements of the Savonarolan message. Pieruccio is seen throughout the novel as the voice of the *popolo* or, more importantly, the *popolo minuto*. He is a loyal follower of Savonarola, a proud patriot and a prophet in his own right. More importantly, he is a *popolano*, spreading the Savonarolan message amongst the people. He is a critical character who reminds us that the Florentine republic was a popular republic, brought about by the will and determination of the *popolo*. Notwithstanding this sympathetic characterisation, it does appear that Guerrazzi has an ambivalent attitude towards Pieruccio. At times it is difficult to know whether he presents him as a true prophet or a charlatan. Is he a real figure or a ghost? Does he speak the truth or are his words the ravings of a mad man? As has been mentioned, Guerrazzi did not subscribe to Savonarola's religious teachings since he was more concerned with the political and social aspects of his reform. In this way, it may be that Guerrazzi is gently deriding Pieruccio's religious devotion whilst highlighting his civic virtue and patriotism. Both Pieruccio and Fra Benedetto are the shining characters in the novel and they are the embodiment of the true Republican spirit. Savonarola's teachings have instilled in them the desire to improve the conditions of the people and to fight for liberty,

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

regardless of the personal sacrifice.<sup>36</sup> Unlike Fra Benedetto who is starved to death by Clement VII, Pieruccio buries himself alive when he knows that his *patria* is truly lost. His death symbolises the burial of Florentine liberty.<sup>37</sup>

While Pieruccio is portrayed as the voice of the *popolo* in the novel, the Dominican, Fra Benedetto, is presented as the direct descendant of Savonarola. Fra Benedetto da Foiano is an animated and dedicated freedom fighter. Like Savonarola, he battles from the pulpit as he openly and bravely condemns the Church and Pope Clement VII. He is a true *piagnone* and he invokes the Friar's name in his sermons, asking his congregation to unite and fight to save Florence:

... se tu Clemente, co' tuoi misfatti non avessi allontanato lo spirito di Dio dalla Chiesa, ora lo scisma non guasterebbe le sue membra, tu non saresti stato avvilito, non avrebbe Roma sofferto il miserevole sacco ... Dio chiederà ai suoi sacerdoti ragione del sangue dei profeti che mandò verso di loro, dal sangue di Abele fino al sangue di Zaccaria e di frate Jeronimo Savonarola, il quale uccisero a vituperio col patibolo infame. Papa Clemente, trema, perché Cristo è tuo giudice, non complice, ed egli ti reciderà, la tua parte metterà con quella degli ipocriti, laddove è pianto e stridore dei denti.<sup>38</sup>

Fra Benedetto represents freedom and religious devotion. His role in the novel is to link the moral and political messages and he calls on the people of Florence to band together and strive to improve themselves morally, spiritually and politically. Guerrazzi uses this Dominican friar to present his political agenda to us through his sermons just as Savonarola used the pulpit to push forward his own calls for constitutional reform. Often quoting Savonarola, Fra Benedetto gives voice to the Savonarolan political message. As we have seen, Guerrazzi treats Savonarola's religious message quite lightly and his own words, when

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<sup>36</sup> Guido Mazzoni, *L'Ottocento*, vol. II, in *Storia letteraria d'Italia*, (Milan, 1973), pp. 122-126.

<sup>37</sup> See F.D. Guerrazzi, *L'assedio di Firenze*, vol. II, pp. 291-292.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 211.

addressing his readership directly, do not carry any spiritual undertones. In this way he is able to use Fra Benedetto not only as a vehicle for his political message, but as his spiritual mouthpiece as he evokes the passion, dedication, courage and fortitude of Savonarola. Fra Benedetto, like Savonarola, pays a very high price for his outspoken views. He is betrayed by Malatesta, delivered to the papal forces and imprisoned in the Castel Sant' Angelo where Pope Clement VII orders that he be starved to death. Guerrazzi, in his narrative, damns the Pope for his treatment of Fra Benedetto whilst reminding us that Savonarola too was put to death by an earlier Pontiff, Alexander VI, thirty two years before:

O pontefici, cosa sarà di voi quando Cristo vi domanderà ragione del sangue dei suoi martiri?<sup>39</sup>

In order to strengthen his messages, Guerrazzi gives us another noble, Savonarolan character, monna Ghita. The true virtue of the *popolo* is personified in her as she is ready to offer her beloved young son, Ciapo, to save her *patria*. She too is a devoted follower of Savonarola. Guerrazzi tells us, through her, that the Friar's revolutionary message is alive and strong in the people of Florence. When, invoking the Friar's words, she declares that it is better to be poor in a free land than wealthy in an enslaved one, Guerrazzi is directly appealing to his readers, asking them to follow Savonarola's words and take up the struggle which he had began:

E senti ancora quello che predicava il beatifico frate Girolamo, perché non hai avuto il bene di ascoltare quella santissima bocca: - Cristiani e fratelli miei, vale meglio pane di fava in repubblica, che pane d'oro sotto il principato.<sup>40</sup>

Mona Ghita is presented as an ordinary woman who is prepared, through self sacrifice and an unwavering love of her city and of freedom, to do extraordinary things. Like all of the Savonarolan inspired characters, she is treated almost reverently in the novel. She exhibits

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 278.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 143.

the admirable qualities of bravery in the face of personal loss, perseverance when confronted with extreme adversity and unwavering commitment to her goal which are all highlighted by her willingness to give not only her own life, but that of her son, for the struggle. It is this sense of bravery and commitment which Guerrazzi uses to inspire his readers. Only then, according to Guerrazzi, when they have embraced the Savonarolan virtues of courage and steadfastness, can they come together and steer the nation to greatness.

Guerrazzi, like many of the other writers of the Risorgimento, realised that in addition to a social and moral renewal, Italy needed to undergo a military one if it were ever to be a truly unified and independent nation. The story of the siege of Florence offers Guerrazzi the perfect vehicle through which to present his military hero to the people. Francesco Ferruccio embodies all the elements of a great and powerful warrior. He is totally committed to his cause and he fights under the flag of virtue, honesty and liberty. He is physically impressive, strong, proud and selfless and his words of defiance, his cries of “Patria e Libertà” and “Viva la Repubblica di Fiorenza! Morte all’impero! Morte al papa!”, echo loudly throughout the novel.<sup>41</sup> Ferruccio and his fellow republicans embody all that is good in the Florence of the siege and all that Italians must aspire to in order to redeem Italy. These characters are willing to die for their land, just as the readers must be ready to sacrifice a great deal if they are to achieve their patriotic aims. Ferruccio is seen as a father figure by Vico and by his men and behaves as such. He instils pride in his men as he motivates and encourages them, reminding them of the nobility of their cause. In turn, they respond with devotion and bravery: “Noi verremo tutti: - voi siete la nostra patria. I soldati amavano il Ferruccio più che padre.” Later Ferruccio declares: “è bisogno incamminarci alla conquista di gloria non come ladri, sibbene da eroi....Viva la Repubblica!”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 272, p. 151.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128

Ferruccio, however, for all his attributes, is rather one dimensional since his greatest virtues and his greatest assets are his military ability and his courage. He cannot offer the people a political vision and he had certainly not been instrumental in developing a programme of political reform. Guerrazzi realised that the Italian people needed more than a military hero, they needed a man with whom the people could identify on a number of different levels and it is only Savonarola who could offer the moral, spiritual, ethical and political example. In this way, although Ferruccio is presented as great man of honour and bravery, it is Savonarola who is chosen by Guerrazzi to help guide the Italian people.

Ferruccio's bravery and virtue are wonderfully contrasted with the novel's villains. Whereas Ferruccio fights because he is passionate about the cause, men such as Malatesta Baglione and Fabrizio Maramaldo have only personal gain as their motive.<sup>43</sup> Malatesta is the elected leader of the republican forces, yet he betrays them in order to align himself with the Pope in the hope that, upon a papal victory, he would gain the Signoria of Perugia. These men are constantly described by Guerrazzi as jealous and petty and, as such, we see that the fate of Florence has been dealt a cruel blow by their selfish actions. Another traitor, Giovanni Bandini, is presented as an example of how much damage can be done when personal desires are placed before the good of a city or of a nation. When he discovers that the father of his beloved Maria dei Ricci has tricked her into believing he is dead, thus allowing her to marry another man, he vows revenge on him and on all Florentines. His treachery is motivated by pride and by hate, Malatesta's and Maramaldo's by greed. It is clear that, whereas the great and honourable characters in the novel fight to save the city because they truly believe in the spirit of liberty and the greater good of the people, the city is ultimately lost due to petty human emotion. Although the Spaniards defeat the republican forces at Gavinana, it is

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<sup>43</sup> Guido Mazzoni, *L'Ottocento*, vol. II, in *Storia Letteraria D'Italia*, p. 123-125.

treachery which is the true undoing of the Florentine republic. Florentines turn on fellow Florentines and the city is ultimately lost. Guerrazzi, like his fellow nationalist authors, is highlighting the fact that all Italians must come together as one if they are to create a unified nation. Italians must choose to fight for Italy, in one way or another. They cannot stand aside, nor align themselves with the foreign invaders since to do so would be to betray the cause of unification.

Guerrazzi's ability as a storyteller is evident throughout the novel as he presents a number of different episodes throughout the work. The love story of Vico Machiavelli and Annalena is beautifully told and provides some welcome respite from the dark and foreboding tone of much of the novel. Annalena herself is the embodiment of purity and loyalty. When the two feuding Buondelmonti brothers overcome their differences after gazing upon her in the church, we realise that goodness and selflessness is what is needed in order for the battle for liberty to be won.<sup>44</sup> The Savonarolan notions of moral renewal and of an improvement in ethical behaviour are portrayed through her. Her beauty of spirit is cleverly contrasted with the ugliness of Malatesta and of Bandini and her presence in the novel is an example of the moral heights Guerrazzi wants his readers to reach. Similarly, the story of her reunion with her father, Lucantonio, is vividly portrayed and he is seen as another example of selfless virtue, willing to sacrifice even his daughter for the cause:

Se, come spero, le ragioni della Patria prevarranno, mi sarà di conforto nel morire il pensiero che la mia diletta figliuola sia commessa alla fede di madre amantissima, - voglio dire Fiorenza. - Se invece, disperda Cristo l'augurio, rimane spenta la libertà, il vivere che monta? Tra morire e vivere da schiavo, la differenza è questa: i morti non sentono nulla, i vivi si consumano sotto il peso delle catene. Lena mia ... dove il leone coronato rimanga insegna della

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<sup>44</sup> F.D. Guerrazzi, *L'assedio di Firenze*, vol. I, pp. 212-214.

Repubblica, tu vivi, ... se le palle trionfano ... eccoti ... prendi questo coltello ...  
comunque corto egli sia può sciogliere un'anima dai legami del corpo.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, Lucantonio's words resound loudly towards the end of the novel as Annalena does die, along with her beloved Vico, when the battle is lost. In honourable fashion, Lucantonio endures great suffering, yet never loses sight of his goal. Lupo Bombardiere describes him to great effect, as he states:

Quell'uomo conta un terzo anni più di te, ha veduto la sua casa incendiata, le sostanze disperse, le terre guaste, e nondimeno pieno di fede spera, o pieno di ardimento fermò nel cuore il suo fine ... Tu, invece dubiti ... ti sconforti, e quello ch'è peggio, sconforti altrui. - Egli non soldato, tu allevato e cresciuto nei campi. - E ciò da che nasce? Nasce dall'essere in lui il cuore buono, il senno ottimo ...<sup>46</sup>

Guerrazzi is positioning Lucantonio as another character with whom his readers can identify. He maintains his dignity, strength and his *cuore buono*, despite overwhelming suffering and loss and these characteristics echo the Savonarolan ideals of fortitude and steadfastness, positioning him as a character inspired by the Friar. Guerrazzi tells his readers, through Lucantonio and also through Vico and Lupo, that they too must learn from the Savonarolan example if they are to see a free and unified Italy emerge.

All episodes in Guerrazzi's novel serve to highlight a particular issue and convey messages to his readers. They are either examples of how treachery and self interest can lead to the destruction of a dream, as with Malatesta and Bandini, or of how virtue and moral superiority can bring a people together and lead a nation to a new and better future. The story of the famous duel between Giovanni Bandini and Ludovico Martelli, and between Dante da

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133, *le palle* were the symbol of the Medici family.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Castiglione and Bertino Aldobrando, are further opportunities for Guerrazzi to highlight his heroes' attributes and his villains' deficiencies. When Dante, the strong and powerful republican fighter, kills Bertino, he repents his actions, mourning the fact that he has killed a fellow Florentine:

O giovanetto: - fossi tu spagnuolo, o tedesco; la mia anima si allegrirebbe: - ora ella piange, - ella maledice la sua fortuna, - ella desidera scambiare teco il destino. O Dante, tu che tanto amasti la patria, qual giudizio ti aspetta in faccia dei posterì!<sup>47</sup>

Italians are killing Italians and Dante realises that this is not the way for the city to emerge victorious. Dante's nobility and his virtue are contrasted sharply with Bandini's treatment of Ludovico. Although Ludovico does not die immediately, Bandini has won the duel. Bandini, a Florentine, has turned on a compatriot, just as he turned on his city and aided in its defeat. Once again, Guerrazzi is asking his readers to examine their own behaviour and their own sense of morality and loyalty.

Throughout *L'assedio di Firenze*, Guerrazzi's own voice is ever present. Whether he is directly addressing his audience or not, Guerrazzi seems to mingle with his characters to the extent that, at certain points, the reader could be forgiven for thinking that he has actually become a player in the sixteenth century saga. Either whilst listening to Ferruccio's patriotic words or Fra Benedetto's passionate sermons, the author seems incapable of remaining silent as he pleads and cajoles his readers, exhorting them to adopt his politics and accept his nationalistic dreams.<sup>48</sup> In addition, he often interrupts his story and speaks directly to his readers, lecturing them on their need for moral and social rejuvenation.

Prima di desiderare la libertà imparate ad essere uomini; - piuttosto che volere repubblica attendete a purgare i rei costumi. Finché voi siate così superbi,

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 88.

<sup>48</sup> Sergio Romagnoli, 'Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi e il romanzo storico', p. 124.

parabolani, frivoli, obliosi, leggieri, pei mali altrui di ghiaccio, fuoco per ogni maniera di diletta, io non abbisognerò della testa di Medusa per farvi impietrite: - pietra siete da voi. - Io vorrei come dentro uno specchio mettervi dinanzi l'anima vostra: - mostro più schifo non partorí natura, né mente di poeta immaginò ... Adesso riprendo la storia.<sup>49</sup>

Throughout the novel Guerrazzi consistently balances the vices, mentioned above, with virtues exhibited by his positive role models. It was equally important for Guerrazzi to give his readers shining, exemplary characters as it was for him to present his villains and the dire consequences of their actions. The author was giving his countrymen a new moral, political and military path to follow. Through his heroes, such as Lucantonio, Vico, Annalena and Ferruccio, he presented the readers with wonderful, rich examples of ethical behaviour, bravery and determination.

Guerrazzi, either speaking directly to his readers or through his characters, uses *Firenze* interchangeably with *Italia* throughout the novel. Passionate cries of “nelle nostre mura difenderemo la causa d'Italia”<sup>50</sup> and “Noi soli difendiamo l'onore, la vita e la libertà dell'Italia ...”<sup>51</sup> reinforce the notion that Guerrazzi is using the siege to prepare his readers for action. Florence in the time of the siege becomes a metaphor for nineteenth-century Italy. His countrymen must decide to either side with the oppressors, or be part of the struggle for a new nation. As he mourns the fall of Florence, he compares it to his own times, 300 years later, declaring that a new, strong people must be prepared to emerge if Italy is to be unified:

Ma Dio dopo tre giorni risorse; - a quando la risurrezione del popolo? Se le giornate della servitú si compongono di cento anni, - tre secoli già sono scorsi

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<sup>49</sup> F.D. Guerrazzi, *L'assedio di Firenze*, vol. I, pp. 138 –139.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

dacché il mio popolo cadde ... Intanto io piango la morte di un popolo, perché un altro ne rinasca.<sup>52</sup>

Guerrazzi wanted *L'assedio di Firenze* to entertain and to instruct his readers. He is passionately involved in every scene, supporting the republican fighters and damning all those who would want to see the city lose its freedom: the Pope, the foreign oppressors and the traitors. In his quest, he uses the powerful weapon of Savonarola, whose republican spirit infuses the entire novel. Guerrazzi calls upon Savonarola's courage and defiance to inspire Italians to speak out against tyranny and against foreign rule just as the Friar had done over 300 years before:

Due furono frati, per quanto io sappia nel mondo, sublimi davvero, e forse tre: - Arnaldo da Brescia e Girolamo Savonarola; e perché i popoli le costoro ossa non convertissero un giorno in reliquie, i re mitrati del Vaticano gli arsero vivi e ne dispersero le ceneri ai venti; ma coteste ceneri ricaddero per i campi d'Italia e vi diffusero il germe del martirio e della libertà: le ceneri e il sangue ottimi fecondatori sono di libertà, e lo vediamo.<sup>53</sup>

Fittingly, the novel's final words belong not to one of Guerrazzi's characters, but to the author himself. Whereas the book started with a tone of scepticism and despair, it concludes with one of hope and Guerrazzi's pleads with his readers to make the dream of a unified Italy a reality:

Io però merito un premio, o ve lo domando. Deh! Fate che prima di chiudersi nel sonno della morte questi miei occhi possano vedervi liberi e felici sopra la terra dei vostri padri.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 105.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

### III

We have seen with Guerrazzi that the nationalist writer used both his literary works and his public position to further the cause of unification. Massimo D'Azeglio, (1798-1866), born in Turin to an aristocratic family, was another well known and respected politician and author who, from a young age, established himself as a patriot. D'Azeglio was a complex man full of contradictions. As a publicist and novelist, he worked assiduously to stir public opinion and promote the idea of a unified Italy. However, his notion of a united Italy did not involve the most southern states.<sup>55</sup> Although he had lived in Rome and spoke with great affection of the city in his memoirs, he did not support the idea that it may become the capital of a united Italy. He fervently supported a parliamentary style of government and, although he felt that royal powers must be limited, he was not averse to seeing those powers used should the situation demand it. Although he played a role in bringing about the independence of Italy, of finally freeing it from foreign rule, he felt, like many of his contemporary patriots, that unification and liberation were happening in the wrong way. Indeed, the Risorgimento was a complex movement and although the ultimate objective was the liberation of the Peninsula, the road to be taken was by no means agreed upon. D'Azeglio's memoirs, *I miei ricordi*,<sup>56</sup> show us that he was passionate about the idea of a unified Italy but was unsure as to the path that should be taken in order to achieve it. He felt that Mazzini's vision was rather fanatical and that his movement, *La Giovane Italia*, was keeping his idealism alive by sacrificing brave and perhaps naïve young Italians. Although D'Azeglio was critical of Mazzini, he was cautious not to openly criticise a fellow patriot.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, he was interested in the political vision of Gioberti that also proposed the notion for a unified Italy, free of the shackles of Austrian rule. However, Gioberti, as we have seen, wanted to see the Pope as leader of a

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<sup>55</sup> Ronald Marshall, *Massimo D'Azeglio, An Artist in Politics 1798-1866*, (London, 1966), p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Massimo D'Azeglio, *I miei ricordi*, edited by A.M. Ghisalberti, (Turin, 1949).

<sup>57</sup> Ronald Marshall, *Massimo D'Azeglio*, pp. 73-80.

new, democratic Italy and D'Azeglio did not think that this model was acceptable. D'Azeglio, like Guerrazzi, wanted to see Italy emerge as a unified, lay, anticlerical, democratic nation. Whereas Guerrazzi was more extreme in his openly left wing, Jacobin political views, D'Azeglio was more moderate in his political leanings. Considering this contrast, it is interesting that both authors chose the same historical event, the siege of Florence, to encapsulate their patriotic messages and deliver them to the people. What is not so surprising, however, is their choice of Savonarola as their exemplar. Who else, in Italian history, could set the political, moral, religious and spiritual example? Who else, in addition to encompassing these qualities and having a strong, brave republican vision, was martyred for his cause?

In 1831, D'Azeglio moved from Turin to Milan as he felt that the city had more to offer him in terms of artistic freedom and inspiration. Milan, at this time, was the intellectual centre of Italy. It was the home of Manzoni (who was to become D'Azeglio's father-in-law), and was the epicentre of Italy's literary and intellectual life. When D'Azeglio left for Milan, he had already begun to pen his first historical novel, *Ettore Fieramosca o la disfida di Barletta*,<sup>58</sup> and in the coming years, the city was to become his home and also the stage for his vast literary success. While in Milan, he became famous as an author of patriotic novels, which gained him widespread recognition and which, in turn, provided the platform for his entry into political life. D'Azeglio, influenced by his cousin, Cesare Balbo, turned his attention to politics in the mid 1840s. In 1845, he travelled through the Romagna, the Marches and Tuscany and it is at this time that his moderate liberal views were formed. He saw the influence of Mazzini and of the secret societies, was distrustful of both, and openly supported

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<sup>58</sup>*Ettore Fieramosca o la disfida di Barletta*, is an overtly patriotic novel which deals with the strong resentment of foreign intervention in Italy. His critical treatment of two of the principal characters, Pope Alexander VI and his son, Cesare Borgia, would not have pleased the ecclesiastical authorities of the day. In addition, the novel deals with the strong resentment toward foreign intervention in Italy.

Piedmont's King, Carlo Alberto. In Turin in 1846, he published his controversial *opuscolo*, "Degli ultimi casi di Romagna", in which he denounced the secret societies and exhorted Italians to trust Carlo Alberto as the only prince ready and able to fight the Austrian powers. This work launched his career as a successful and influential pamphleteer for the moderate wing of Italian nationalism and, when he travelled to Rome in 1847 to meet with the new pontiff, Pius IX, he wrote a number of other pamphlets in which he called on the Italian people to band together in the struggle for a free and united Italy. D'Azeglio's political career progressed rapidly and on 7 May, 1849, after having previously turned down the offer from King Vittorio Emanuele, he accepted the position of Prime Minister of Sardinia and Piedmont. He governed until 1852, at which time he resigned the position in favour of Cavour. During his time as Prime Minister he fought to see a peace settlement reached with Austria, was instrumental in reorganising the armies and he constantly pushed for anticlerical legislation. Upon his resignation, he supported Cavour in the Crimean War and in the war against Austria in 1859. In 1860, perhaps in recognition of his work in favour of unification, Cavour named him governor of Milan.

D'Azeglio's political career, together with his earlier literary and artistic success, ensured that his voice was heard throughout the Peninsula. Although he did not formally enter the political arena until the mid to late 1840s, it is clear from his literary works that he had an eye on the political situation of Italy from very early on. He was a fierce patriot and he realised, just as Guerrazzi had done, that in order for Italy to rid itself of foreign oppressors, it needed to undergo a spiritual and ethical renewal, in addition to a military one. D'Azeglio's earlier literary successes, together with his growing importance in the political arena, would have helped to ensure that *Niccolò de' Lapi ovvero i palleschi e i piagnoni*, the historical novel under examination, gained wide, popular recognition. This is supported by the fact that, in the nineteenth century, new editions of the novel appeared in 1850, 1853, 1866, 1877 and 1895.

D'Azeglio's *Niccolò de' Lapi ovvero i palleschi e i piagnoni* was first published in 1841 but, according to the author's memoirs, was started years earlier.<sup>59</sup> It is worth noting that it was published in Milan since D'Azeglio would have realised that in this city he had the best hope of having his book passed by the censors. Indeed, the censor of the day was a scholar, Father Mauro Colonnetti, and he allowed the novel to be published, asking only that D'Azeglio explain certain passages in order to safeguard himself.<sup>60</sup> Like Guerrazzi's *L'assedio di Firenze*, the novel deals with the siege of Florence in 1529 and 1530 which culminated in the re-establishment of Medici rule. *Niccolò de' Lapi* is a descriptive, highly charged novel which transports the reader back to the sixteenth century and into the lives and minds of the major players in the siege of Florence. D'Azeglio researched his book assiduously and, in its preface, he tells us that he had never been totally satisfied when reading historical depictions of the event. He wanted to learn about the hearts and minds of the people and to know how their lives were affected by the tumultuous events. In his memoirs he states that:

No, non conosco tutto quanto vorrei conoscere quando leggo gli onorati fatti di que' cittadini animosi, le battaglie, i tumulti, le pratiche; quando li vedo in piazza magistrati, soldati, capi di parte; io ammiro in essi la virtù, la costanza, la fortezza ... ma domando invano allo storico quali fosser costoro che eran pur padri, mariti, figli, fratelli, quali fosser, dico, quando dopo una tempestosa giornata ritornavan la sera tra le pareti domestiche; quando, depresso l'arnese di guerra, e cercando un po' di sosta alle cure, ai travagli che li stringevano al di fuori, riprendevano negli intimi colloqui della famiglia la forza di gettarsi a nuovi pericoli, a nuove fatiche.<sup>61</sup>

In his approach, D'Azeglio may have been inspired by Walter Scott and by his dedication to provide accurate descriptions of clothes, language, housing and landscape of the day. He

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<sup>59</sup> D'Azeglio states that he had began writing this novel as early as 1831 or 1832. *I miei ricordi*, p. 493.

<sup>60</sup> Guido Mazzoni, *L'Ottocento*, vol. II, in *Storia letteraria d'Italia*, p. 137.

<sup>61</sup> Massimo D'Azeglio, *Niccolò de' Lapi*, (pref.), p. 222.

realised that for the novel to have broad appeal and truly instruct and motivate the people it had to be compelling and captivate the reader. As with Guerrazzi, the historical sources which guided D'Azeglio were Benedetto Varchi and Iacopo Nardi. These sources provide the seed for the treatment of patriotism, for the development of the themes of the renewal of the individual. The tone of the book alternates between one of sobriety and reflection to one of hope, anger, frustration and anguish. Its theme is heroic endurance and the acceptance of exile or death over dishonour. The strong sense of patriotism permeates the entire novel as D'Azeglio presents to the people the Florentine rebellion against tyranny, both of the Church and of the Medici.

*Niccolò de' Lapi* is an entertaining novel with a simple yet powerful storyline. In essence, the novel follows the life of the Lapi family during the siege and D'Azeglio uses the family's private drama to echo the turmoil facing Florence during this time. The story line is simple and would have been highly appealing to the readers of the day as it has all the hallmarks of a popular novel. The Lapi family, headed by Niccolò, is fighting with the republican forces to preserve Florentine liberty. The family is betrayed by Troilo who feigns love for the virtuous Lisa de' Lapi and marries her in what later transpires to be a false ceremony. Niccolò, horrified that his daughter has married and borne a son to a *pallesco*, banishes her from his home only to welcome her again when he believes (wrongly) that Troilo has repented his earlier actions and decided to fight with the *piagnoni*. In addition to the family drama, D'Azeglio presents us with two more villains, Malatesta Baglioni and Baccio Valori who betray Florence for personal gain. These characters are used to great effect, demonstrating the terrible consequences of treachery and selfishness. Even though the city is lost at the battle of Gavinana and many of the heroes lose their lives, the novel ends on a note of optimism as D'Azeglio forces his readers to examine their own situations, draw strength from the past and acknowledge that a new and free Italy is, indeed, a possibility.

The end result of the siege of 1529 – 1530 was less important for D’Azeglio and his patriotic aims than the struggle itself. The author presents Niccolò as the hero of the people during the siege. Niccolò di messer Cione de’ Lapi, is the leader of the *piagnoni* and the motivator of the resistance movement. He is devoted to the republican cause and to the memory of Savonarola which still burned strongly in the hearts of many Florentines. He has modelled his life on the Friar, whom he knew personally and whom he considered a friend. His ardent devotion is evidenced, in part, by the fact that in his home he keeps an urn containing ashes from the stake on which Savonarola was hanged and burned.

Accanto al letto era una nicchia nel muro alta quattro braccia dal pavimento, nella quale stava appiccata una tonaca da domenicano; sott’essa un’urna d’argento ... l’urna conteneva le ceneri del rogo sul quale era stato arso, e queste cose, che Niccolò teneva quali reliquie d’un martire e come memorie d’un maestro e d’un amico, erano da lui guardate con tenera ed altissima venerazione.<sup>62</sup>

In Niccolò, D’Azeglio reignites the Savonarolan spirit and the ideals of liberty and freedom. Just as the Friar was willing to die for his cause, Niccolò is ready to sacrifice everything in order to achieve his religious and political aims and the price he pays is very high. During the siege, his fortune is lost, four of his sons are killed, many of his fellow *piagnoni* lose their lives and the city is reconquered by the Medici. He sees his youngest daughter betrayed by the villainous Troilo degli Ardinghelli and Niccolò himself falls victim to his lies and treachery as he accepts him into his home and believes that he now wants to fight alongside the *piagnoni*. In a final evocation of Savonarola’s struggle and ultimate sacrifice for his beliefs, Niccolò himself is tortured and put to death, just like the Friar, calmly and bravely. Through accepting his fate, Niccolò takes on super human proportions as he is staunch in his

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<sup>62</sup> Massimo D’Azeglio, *Niccolò de’ Lapi*, p. 296.

views, never wavering from his aim despite the terrible suffering inflicted on him and on those who are fighting with him. He is an inspirational character who does not care for his own mortal being but only for the achievement of the ultimate goal, which is the successful defence of Florence. It is easy to see the similarities between him and Savonarola. D'Azeglio tells us early in the novel that Niccolò was one of Savonarola's earliest devotees and has lived his life devoutly and uncompromisingly, following the Friar's teachings and his examples.

Tra i primi ed i più devoti seguaci di Fra Girolamo Savonarola mentre viveva, lo piangeva morto, venerandolo come un martire; studiando di osservare in ogni sua azione ed in ogni tempo, senza aver rispetto a cosa del mondo, le severe massime del frate, le quali, dobbiam confessarlo, lo portavano talvolta a convertire la mansueta legge del vangelo in una legge tirannica ed impraticabile.<sup>63</sup>

D'Azeglio, like Guerrazzi, is suspicious of the overtly religious element in Savonarolan teaching. Niccolò's uncompromising beliefs appear rigid and unattainable but D'Azeglio presents him as the great hero regardless. D'Azeglio was an admirer of the Friar and believed in his moral and social reforms. Although he, like Guerrazzi, wanted a lay, anti-clerical Italy to emerge, he was not averse to presenting Savonarola's religious devotion and the subsequent reverence that his followers had for him. Like Savonarola, Niccolò often refers to his fellow *piagnoni* as his children and they see him as a type of father figure.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, one may argue that Niccolò is the fictional embodiment of the Friar, and in Niccolò's struggle, D'Azeglio is presenting Savonarola and his fight for Florentine liberty against the depravity and corruption of the Church and of the Medici tyrants. The novel is the perfect medium to educate the people as it entertains and instructs, it inspires yet also presents a frightening picture of what inaction, treachery and betrayal can lead to. The feelings and the

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>64</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 580 – 582 for an example of how Niccolò is seen as the father of their cause and for how he views himself as protector and guardian of the people.

passions of the main characters are expressed well but these do not form the central theme of the novel. In the late 1830s, patriotic feelings were rapidly gaining momentum. However, the problem of how to unite the population in order to achieve an independent Italy was complicated and not resolved. Luigi Tomeucci argues that, at a time when the sense of political and social change was almost palpable, many varied solutions to the question of Italian liberty were put forward.<sup>65</sup> D'Azeglio does not seek to provide Italians with a clear path to unification. He lays the foundation for it by rousing the Italian people and reigniting in them a sense of dignity and purpose. He wanted his readers to realise that they could regain their dignity only when Italy was free from foreign rule. Savonarola and Niccolò are the heroes who will motivate the Italians.

Niccolò's unremitting struggle for freedom has exacted a high price. Early in the novel, we find Niccolò and his family and friends praying throughout the night over the body of his son, Baccio, killed in the fighting. He has already lost his eldest son, Bernardo, and his youngest and dearest son, Bindo, is now eager to join the battle. The sense of *patria* is established from the outset as Niccolò, handing Bindo his older brother, Baccio's, armour, states:

E s'io non piango sappi che non è per poco amore ch'io portassi a codesto mio carissimo figliuolo e tuo fratello, ma perché conoscendo essere ogni uomo obbligato in primo luogo al nostro Signore Iddio, ed alla sua santa fede, in secondo luogo alla patria.<sup>66</sup>

As is the case throughout the novel, D'Azeglio, through Niccolò, speaks to a nation, hoping to ignite in it a passion to defend its liberty. Like Savonarola, he openly rejects Medicean tyranny and calls on the people to fight for freedom:

Cominciò a bisbigliarsi dell'assedio, e Niccolò confidando nella famosa profezia di Fra Girolamo: '*Florentia flagellabitur, et post flagella*

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<sup>65</sup> Luigi Tomeucci, *Massimo D'Azeglio, autore e padre della questione italiana*, (Bologna, 1969), pp. 20-29.

<sup>66</sup>Massimo D'Azeglio, *Niccolò de' Lapi*, p. 247.

*renovabitur*', tenne sempre per la parte che rifiutava ogni accordo co' Medici, e pose in opera quant'era in poter suo per accendere il popolo alla difesa.<sup>67</sup>

Niccolò is portrayed as the defender of faith and of liberty and his actions are driven by the example of Savonarola. His religious fervour, together with his perseverance in the face of enormous obstacles and his intransigence, all combine to make him a truly Savonarolan character. D'Azeglio inextricably links religion and liberty in his novel as liberty and love of one's country are seen as being essential ingredients for human virtue. In order for the people to be truly liberated, they must return to the spiritual church of which Savonarola preached. Similarly, Niccolò, whilst speaking to his son-in-law, tells us that liberty is essential for the spiritual and social rebirth of the people:

Ora dunque ascoltami: tieni a mente, che questa casa venne in qualche riputazione e si mantenne onorata e sicura attenendosi alla nostra santa religione ed alla libertà di questo stato popolare; le quali cose non è possibile che stieno l'una senza l'altra. Religione senza libertà non sarà religione, ma frode ed ipocrisia.<sup>68</sup>

Niccolò's sense of virtue and high standards of behaviour and morality seem almost unattainable. His unwavering devotion appears difficult to comprehend in the face of the loss of his family and of his city. However, through it all, he, like Savonarola, displays the attributes of everyman. He is a stern disciplinarian yet he loves his family and is often described as hugging and caressing his children. When he is captured, imprisoned in the Bargello and sentenced to death, he faces his own death on the scaffold with courage and dignity; yet, when he finally admits that the battle is lost, he sits down and weeps openly. Although he is single-minded and inflexible, he is also inspired and inspiring and sees this

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 455.

mortal world as merely a stepping stone to the greater, eternal world.<sup>69</sup> Niccolò personifies the strength and the selflessness of the *popolo* and just as he is the hero of the novel, the *popolo* must be the hero of the struggle for Italian liberty.<sup>70</sup>

In D’Azeglio’s novel as in Guerrazzi’s *L’assedio di Firenze*, all characters are seen in relation to the Savonarolan protagonists. There is no room for grey as they are either patriots, ready to die for their cause, or they are enemies of it. In stark contrast to Niccolò, D’Azeglio gives us the anti-heroes of the novel, Troilo degli Ardinghelli and Baccio Valori. These treacherous men are driven purely by self interest and small minded pettiness. In addition, there is Malatesta who is portrayed as a sad, desolate man who, had it not been for his greed, may have been a great leader and inspirational figure. All of these characters lie, cheat and betray not only those around them, but Florence as a whole. In this way, they are directly contrasted with Niccolò and his followers. Indeed, throughout the entire novel, the division between the *piagnoni* and the *palleschi* is strikingly obvious as D’Azeglio ensures that all the novel’s light shines on the former, whilst the latter are constantly depicted in shadows and darkness. This technique was, of course, essential to D’Azeglio’s broader aims since he wanted his readers to identify with the values - patriotic, ethical and social - of the fearless and selfless.

The novel’s greatest villain, Troilo, is an insidious character who systematically deceives and thereby contaminates Niccolò and his family. By doing so, he is presented as playing a pivotal role in the ultimate defeat of the city. His betrayal begins with his seduction and

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<sup>69</sup> Ronald Marshall, *Massimo D’Azeglio*, p. 66.

<sup>70</sup> Giovanni Donna d’Oldenico, ‘Massimo d’Azeglio e Girolamo Savonarola– variazioni sul Risorgimento 1530 è storia di popolo: storia di artigiani e di prodigi di valore, di sacrificio tali che sconsigliano e incuorano a un tempo: sconsigliano ogni qualvolta scendendo da quei fatti ai nostri tempi troviamo le moltitudini d’artigiani italiani’, in *Memorie domenicane*, 67, (1950), 201-210, p. 203, states: “La storia dell’assedio di Firenze nel immemori della patria, trascinarsi senza dignità personale, senza coscienza italiana, per una serie d’atti quasi istintivi e meccanici, e morire...”

deception of Niccolò's youngest daughter, Lisa, when he pretends to marry her secretly in, what is, a clandestine ceremony. When Niccolò discovers his daughter's betrayal and the fact that she has not only 'married' a *pallesco* but borne him a son, he drives her out of the house. As often happens in the novel, the drama turns to melodrama as Lisa is sent out into the icy night, with only her infant son and the clothes she is wearing. Niccolò describes Lisa's actions as a betrayal of her father and of her city and <sup>71</sup> as one would expect, he is unforgiving:

È dunque vero! ... Dimmi, femmina d'inferno, vergogna mia, vergogna della tua casa, non potevi prima ammazzarmi, e poi far quel che tu hai fatto? Non vi eran più coltelli in Firenze? Ci voleva tanto a spegner l'ultimo fiato di vita d'un vecchio di novant'anni? ... Togliermi la vita? Che mi toglievi? Ma l'onore salvato per tanti anni puro, intatto insin ad oggi! ... Fuori di questa casa.<sup>72</sup>

Lisa's eviction, her subsequent struggle to find Troilo and the many other conflicts that we witness in Niccolò's home are indicative of D'Azeglio's ability to interweave the private lives of his protagonists with the public story he wishes to tell. The greater battle for Florentine liberty is made more real and accessible by the everyday struggles fought by Niccolò and his friends and family. Through them, we identify with the characters as we see them not only as fighters of freedom, as selfless soldiers willing to die for their cause, but as normal people experiencing the same emotions as everyone else. Certainly they are driven by noble sentiments, yet we also witness their pain and anger, their jealousies and fears. In the character of Troilo, we see the worst of human nature yet this negative portrayal is essential as it is only by juxtaposing his vanity, egoism and self interest to the essential goodness, altruism and generosity of the *piagnoni*, that true virtue can shine. D'Azeglio demands that the reader identify with Niccolò and his followers since Troilo, Baccio and

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<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 378. As Niccolò explains to the jilted Lamberto what has occurred, he says: "Ebbene, sappi dunque, ch'io sono vituperato, che la Lisa ha tradito me, ha tradito te, la casa sua, la patria..."

<sup>72</sup> Massimo D'Azeglio, *Niccolò de' Lapi*, in *Romanzi*, p. 331-332.

Malatesta have no redeeming qualities with which any self-respecting person could identify. Troilo's deceptive and immoral nature is established early and his actions, without exception, are totally devoid of any goodness. At one point, after Troilo has thrown himself at Niccolò's feet, begging for forgiveness and asking to be accepted in his house, D'Azeglio addresses his readers directly, as he often does throughout the novel, and speaks of the perversity of this character:

Ad alcun fra' miei lettori, o le mie lettrici, se avrò la fortuna d'averne, parrà forse impossibile che un cuore umano possa giungere a tanta perversità. Beati loro. Hanno la fortuna di non conoscere tutte le vergogne della nostra natura!<sup>73</sup>

Throughout the novel, D'Azeglio strives to show the reader that the struggle for liberty is the domain of every Italian and not merely of Florentine interest. To this end, D'Azeglio introduces Fanfulla da Lodi, a character who was first presented to the people in *Ettore Fieramosca* and who is, as he was then, earthy, robust, immensely likeable and, essentially, a good and decent man. After the siege of Rome, in which Fanfulla fought and was seriously injured, he decides, in the hope of saving his soul, to enter the Dominican convent of San Marco in Florence and become Fra Giorgio. But the Florentine siege re-ignites his passion and, once again, he is driven to fight for liberty, and to join the republican armies in the quest against the papacy and the imperial forces, all in the name of Savonarola. The great passion which he displays for his cause, his loyalty to Niccolò and to his family, his sense of compassion for his fellow man - which is beautifully displayed when he finds the shamed Lisa wandering the streets with her infant - all combine to make Fanfulla a likeable and real character. His physical appearance, his odd way of speaking and the contrasts between his old military life, his struggles with the responsibilities of being Fra Giorgio and his decision to take up arms once again make him rather endearing. However, unlike Niccolò whose

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 449.

goodness is driven by his deep spirituality, Fanfulla's is driven by his innate and fundamental decency despite not having "a particle of spirituality in his make-up."<sup>74</sup> In addition to offering the reader another example of high ethical behaviour, Fanfulla also serves as a figure of comedy in a sombre background.<sup>75</sup> D'Azeglio's comedic ability is displayed, to some extent, in the descriptions of Fanfulla and in the conversations he has with the other characters. Fanfulla is an integral and vital part of D'Azeglio's story. With him, D'Azeglio brings to life a character who embodies the traits of goodness, compassion, generosity, bravery, loyalty and love of liberty and of *patria*. D'Azeglio's readers would have been able to identify readily with Fanfulla as he represents the ideal notion of the soldier.<sup>76</sup> His fearlessness on the battlefield gives him an aura of indestructibility and his roguish ways render him widely popular. The author uses Fanfulla to show, once again, that the fight for freedom must be taken up by all Italians. Although Fanfulla joined the convent, he is essentially a lay character and it is interesting that D'Azeglio moves him to the forefront of his novel, using him as an important example of unity. He is a real, identifiable character who fought bravely and died valiantly and without regret for his cause. Fanfulla's determination, dedication to the cause and unwavering courage evoke the Savonarolan spirit, and D'Azeglio uses him cleverly to show that the Friar's example can inspire all.

D'Azeglio's excellent characterisation of Troilo, Fanfulla and Niccolò, coupled with his attractive narrative, does not, unfortunately, mean that the novel is without fault. As has been mentioned, he often lapses into unnecessary melodrama and his portrayal of Lamberto is also disappointing. Lamberto is seen as Niccolò's surrogate son, having lived in the Lapi household since the death of his father when he was a child. Lamberto's father saved Niccolò's life during the battle between the *arrabbiati* in the church of San Marco, losing his

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<sup>74</sup> Ronald Marshall, *Massimo D'Azeglio*, p. 67.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Guido Mazzoni, *L'Ottocento*, vol. II, p. 140.

own life in the process. In gratitude, Niccolò raises Lamberto as if he were his own. Lamberto is a fierce patriot, loving son to his mother, a devoted 'son' to Niccolò and brave soldier. Through it all, however, he comes across as dull and rather aloof. He has none of the roguishness of Fanfulla, or the complexity of Troilo and he lacks a vigorous and passionate personality. Even the love story between him and Niccolò's eldest daughter, Laudomia, is devoid of any passion and quite uninteresting. Even more unconvincing is Troilo's desire for Laudomia. This whole episode seems superfluous and rather misplaced and does not serve any purpose in the novel. Perhaps D'Azeglio was merely trying to make his novel more popular by introducing this rather lurid turn. Alternatively, he may have been trying to show, once again, the true degree of Troilo's depravity, although one would assume that this was already well demonstrated. Perhaps he was attempting to show Laudomia in a more interesting light. Until this point, she is seen as the angelic older daughter who is incapable of any wrongdoing or unvirtuous thought. When she threatens to throw herself into the well, preferring death to having to surrender to the sordid intentions of Troilo, she displays a courage and sense of fortitude that had not previously been present. However, even this twist in the narrative does not succeed in making her likeable, nor does it render the whole scene more acceptable.

Similarly, the descriptions of Lamberto's gallantry and bravery on the battlefield, both during the naval battle (chapter XIV) against the Spanish forces, and the battle at Gavinana (chapter XXV11) where he fights alongside Fanfulla, do not manage to elevate him to heroic status. Although we recognise Lamberto's good qualities and we want him to be victorious, both in battle and in his quest to be happy with Laudomia, he does not inspire us in the way that Niccolò does or in the way he may have done had he been portrayed in a more convincing and realistic manner. We forgive Niccolò his impossibly virtuous ways because, in him, we

see Savonarola.<sup>77</sup> However, Lamberto is too young and too inexperienced to be given this role and, as a consequence, readers do not identify with him in the same way as they do with Niccolò. Notwithstanding these imperfections, his character does add to the total atmosphere of the novel where we are constantly presented with people who are willing to sacrifice everything for their cause. Lamberto is the face of youth and renewal. He, along with Bindo, represents the new generation of soldiers who are willing to sacrifice everything to their country and, through them, D'Azeglio is directly appealing to the young men of the 1840s and igniting in them the passion and the desire to fight for a united and free Italy.

D'Azeglio's storytelling skills are no better demonstrated than in his realistic battle scenes. In the battle of Gavinana, he does not attempt to give an overall view of the battle, rather he lets us see the action through the eyes of Lamberto and Fanfulla. Through them, we are shown the bravery of the soldiers, the pain of the wounded and the sheer number of casualties. We see the death of two of Niccolò's sons, Vieri and Averardo and we witness Fanfulla's and Lamberto's brave struggle to save the youngest son, Bindo. The battle appears confused; at times it seems to be taking place in slow motion but we become aware that this is how the soldiers themselves would have been viewing the action. D'Azeglio uses this stylistic tool often throughout the novel as feelings, emotions and situations are viewed through the eyes of the characters, rather than through the narrator. In this way, the story itself becomes more vivid, the characters more realistic and, consequently, the messages he wishes to convey more accessible to his readers. Niccolò himself is a wonderful vehicle through which the grand struggle for freedom can be presented. Although two of his sons have died in the battle and although the struggle for the liberation of his city is lost and he finds himself facing death at the hands of his enemies, he never wavers in his convictions.

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<sup>77</sup> We are also shown the negative Savonarolan aspects of rigidity and severity which are not, however, elaborated by D'Azeglio.

His words of defiance resonate in the readers' minds as he tells the Lord that he would have willingly given Him the life of his only remaining son and would have accepted the end of his family line, but he cannot accept the loss of the freedom of his beloved city. He asks the Lord why he did not save Florence:

Con che cuore ti diedi, Dio mio, la vita de' miei figliuoli! Con che allegrezza t'avrei donata quella dell'ultimo che mi resta! ... Avrei visto l'ultima rovina della mia povera casa ... Ma Firenze! ... Dio mio! ... perché non salvasti Firenze? <sup>78</sup>

When Lamberto, Bindo and Fanfulla arrive, disguised as monks, to free Niccolò, he refuses their help and chooses to die in the Bargello. He has seen his city lose its freedom and he does not want to risk the lives of these younger men when they may be able to serve the city in its struggle for liberty at some later stage. He implores them not to think of him, but of Florence:

Ad essa pensate, e non a me ... pensate ad uscir di qui, e ridurvi in salvo, voi che siete giovani, e vi potete valere della vita vostra ... pensate a rannodar i fuorusciti della parte del popolo...io son invecchiato in queste bisogne [sic], e so come si conducono ... pensate a preparar la vendetta...a tornar forti un giorno, e liberar quella patria che non abbiam saputo guardar dai traditori.<sup>79</sup>

Niccolò dies as he has lived - valiantly and bravely - in a manner reminiscent of Savonarola. The three men he implored to continue the struggle for liberty, do, indeed, continue to fight for the freedom of Florence in the years to come and Bindo and Fanfulla lose their lives doing so. D'Azeglio is thus reassuring Italians that the battle has not stopped and that the time has now come again for the Italian people to take up the struggle for independence and to make the dream of a united Italy a reality.

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<sup>78</sup> Massimo D'Azeglio, *Niccolò de' Lapi*, in *Romanzi*, p. 656.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p. 680.

*Niccolò de' Lapi*, like Guerrazzi's *L'assedio di Firenze*, is dark in tone and espouses the themes of heroic endurance in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. The sense of self-sacrifice, of death over dishonour pervades these novels as does a high sense of morality and patriotism. D'Azeglio and Guerrazzi, like many of the patriotic authors, were turning to a past event, an event that typified valour and courage, to steel a people and to show them that the way to freedom was through struggle and sacrifice. The themes of the novels are nationalism and patriotism. The true hero is Savonarola, with his popular vision and his call for a moral and ethical rebirth of the people. It is the Friar who drives the fight for liberty. D'Azeglio, like Savonarola, knows that only through the will and actions of the *popolo*, will it be possible to bring about a change in the political situation in Italy. As Giovanni Donna d'Oldenico states in his essay, 'Massimo D'Azeglio e Girolamo Savonarola', the novel was aimed at the people in general and, in it, D'Azeglio expresses his conviction "che non solamente l'Italia è chiamata ad esser Nazione, ma che nel *popolo* sta il segreto della Nazione futura, delle sue glorie e delle sue speranze."<sup>80</sup>

D'Azeglio, like Guerrazzi, knew that Italians needed to change their ways if they were ever to create a united and free Italy. D'Azeglio implores his readers to change their own behaviour by following the examples of morality, perseverance and courage which he presents to them through his heroes. D'Azeglio was looking for an improvement in the character of Italians and he expressed this in his memoirs by saying: "il primo bisogno d'Italia è che si formino Italiani che sappiano adempiere al loro dovere; quindi che si formino alti e forti caratteri."<sup>81</sup> Through his patriotic novel, D'Azeglio is taking up the fight for independence beginning with the education of the people. The Savonarolan spirit is his main weapon as D'Azeglio cleverly presents the Friar's messages in order to show the people how

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<sup>80</sup> Giovanni Donna d'Oldenico, 'Massimo D'Azeglio e Girolamo Savonarola – variazioni sul Risorgimento italiano', p. 203.

<sup>81</sup> Massimo D'Azeglio, *Ricordi e opere varie*, p. 87.

they must behave if they are ever to realise their patriotic dreams. D'Azeglio's only objective is the creation of a new united and free Italy and, with *Niccolò de' Lapi*, he attempts to rouse the people's patriotism, to push them towards action and to steer them towards unification.

#### IV

Whereas Guerrazzi and D'Azeglio eschewed religious issues in their novels, Giuseppe Revere placed them at the centre of his play, *I piagnoni e gli arrabbiati*, published in 1843. Revere was born in Trieste in 1812 and died in Rome in 1889. Although very little is written on either his life or his works, it appears that, although encouraged by his parents to pursue a commercial career, he moved to Milan and studied literature, languages and philosophy. He was a patriot and a devout Catholic, but unlike Guerrazzi and D'Azeglio, he did not play a major political role in the Risorgimento. In 1848, Revere joined some followers of Mazzini and took part in a political uprising in Venice which led to his banishment. He subsequently joined the forces defending Rome and later travelled to Piedmont where he met and formed friendships with many patriots of the day. It was here that he began to contribute articles, patriotic in nature, to the nationalistic journal, *La Concordia*. In the years to come, he wrote a small number of historical plays,<sup>82</sup> love stories and numerous poems<sup>83</sup> and he published his last work, *Tucioli*, at the age of 72. Although he was not as well known and did not have the political renown of either Guerrazzi or D'Azeglio, his main nationalistic drama, *I piagnoni e gli arrabbiati*, attracted a good deal of public interest. In the years after its publication, new editions of the play were printed in 1846, 1860 and 1897.

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<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, he wrote a play entitled *Lorenzino de' Medici*, (Milan, 1839) prior to writing *I piagnoni e gli arrabbiati*.

<sup>83</sup> Amongst his romantic works are *Sandro setaiolo*, and *Le sventure di un pittore*. His poetic works include *Sdegno ed affetto*, (Milan, 1845), *Nuovi sonetti*, (Capolago, 1846), *Marengo*, (Milan, 1848) and *Le Nemese*, (Turin, 1851).

*I piagnoni e gli arrabbiati* has none of the overt, patriotic statements of the other two works previously discussed. Revere was a patriot who wanted to see a unified Italy, however, his play concentrates more on the ethical and social renewal of a people rather than on overt political models for unification. Although he does not present any concrete path to unification, he does urge Italians, just as Guerrazzi and D'Azeglio had done before him, to come together and strive for an ethical and spiritual rejuvenation. Revere's message in the play focuses on the need for a change in the moral behaviour of the people. For this reason he sets his play during Savonarola's lifetime. His heroes are Savonarola and his followers. His villains are Savonarola's opponents who conspire to destroy the Friar and all that he was trying to achieve. Revere does not address the issues of the Risorgimento directly in the play, nor is he interested in the military improvement of a nation. He argues that it is moral and spiritual renewal, and the rejection of tyranny as well as the corruption it engenders which sets a people free. His message, with its overtly religious overtones, would have been well received by the Catholic patriots of the day.

*I piagnoni e gli arrabbiati* deals with the turbulent latter years of Savonarola's apostolate and with his subsequent martyrdom. As in the two works previously discussed, all characters are viewed in relation to Savonarola. They are either supporters of the Friar, of his call for moral regeneration, of his dream of a free and independent Florence, or they are enemies of his and of all for which he is striving. Savonarola's supporters are the heroes of the work, dealt with kindly, almost reverently by Revere. The villains are shrouded in darkness and are often portrayed as vulgar and one dimensional. As a piece of theatre, it is a very long and often rambling work and it is difficult to find any information on whether the play was ever actually staged. However, it would have been well accepted by the readers of the day (if not a live audience) since its nationalistic message is delivered in an entertaining and realistic fashion. The imagery of the play is vivid and readers would have been able to identify with

the noble characters in the work. Revere weaves his story well, drawing the readers into the lives of his protagonists and ensuring they are edified by Savonarola's dedication and devotion to freedom and to Florence, but repelled by the treachery and deceit of the villains. In adopting the cause of the heroes, the readers champion freedom, goodness and virtue. Once again, this nationalistic author gives us an historical story delivered in a fictional manner so as to capture the attention and interest of the nineteenth-century public.

The play is set in 1498, more specifically from 7 April, the day before Savonarola's trial by fire, to 23 May, the day of his execution. Like Guerrazzi and D'Azeglio, Revere takes an episode in history and presents it to us through the popular vehicle of fiction. We see the action unfold predominantly through the eyes of Revere's main characters and, as we would expect, he divides them into his heroes and his villains. The heroes are the *piagnoni*, fighting to uphold Savonarola's principles and ideals. The villains are the *arrabbiati* who conspire to destroy the Friar and all that he stands for. The play centres on the love story between Sandro and Lena, devout followers and devotees of Savonarola. Lena is the daughter of Vanni Cartolaio, an ardent *arrabbiato* totally opposed to his daughter's union with Sandro. Through their struggle to be together and the division it causes in the Cartolaio household, Revere presents the public struggle and division evident in Florence during this time. Throughout the play, the readers are asked from the outset to make a choice between the Savonarolan virtues of honesty, bravery, perseverance, determination and moral rectitude and the far from desirable traits of deceit, selfishness and cowardice. Powerful and virtuous characters such as Francesco Valori are contrasted with the amoral figures of Lotta and Vanni and underlying all the drama, is the enormous presence of Savonarola himself. In the opening scene, Revere sets the tone for the rest of the play as he introduces us to three *arrabbiati*: Lo Stracciacappa, Il Lisciadiavoli and Il Malguadagno. As their names suggest, these are untrustworthy and unsavoury men. They are opponents of Savonarola and, when

they begin to talk with the two *contadini*, Bindo and Meo, the contrast between the two groups of men is strikingly evident. Revere ensures that his two peasants are viewed as honest and likeable. Through them we hear the voice of the *popolo* condemning the excesses of the wealthy and the subjugation and exploitation of the poor. The *contadini* have heard that Fra Girolamo has preached against corruption in all its forms and that he has fought relentlessly to rid Florence of its immoral elements:

... abbiamo sentito che fra Girolamo fece un gran bene a Firenze, e che tutti quelli che son timorati d'Iddio gli van dietro, perché e' predica contro i cattivi, e che s'intenda anco di profezie e di miracoli...<sup>84</sup>

Lo Stracciacappa and his companions are the voice of Savonarola's enemies, denouncing the Friar's austere message and strict devotion. They accuse Savonarola and his followers of heresy and attack his involvement in Florentine politics and his opposition to Florence joining the Italian League:

E voglion mettere la lingua dove non hanno a far nulla, e ficcare il naso nel governo dello stato, come fece questo fratacchione, non ci lasciando entrare nella lega d'Italia con quelle sue ciurmate profezie; sicché fummo in guerra con tutto il mondo, e tutto questo per istarcene poi fedeli a quel marrano sleale di Carlo, che dopo di averci gabbato, ci lasciò come tanti zughì.<sup>85</sup>

Revere uses the enmity between the *piagnoni* and the *arrabbiati* to excellent dramatic effect. Even though they were later to come together through "their fervent devotion to republican principles and, more importantly, by their implacable hatred of the Medici,"<sup>86</sup> they were totally divided in their views on the Friar, and it is this betrayal of Savonarolan ideology which lies at the heart of Revere's work. The play portrays Florence as a city divided and on the brink of a crisis as the *piagnoni* fight to uphold Savonarola's message and stand united in

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<sup>84</sup> Giuseppe Revere, *I piagnoni e gli arrabbiati*, vol. I, p. 10.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20-21.

<sup>86</sup> L. Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation*, p. 360.

their devotion to him and his ideals, whilst the *arrabbiati* plot to destroy him and his followers. The lay leader and hero of the *piagnoni* is Francesco Valori, great man of honour, respected member of the Florentine government, virtuous citizen and brave soldier. Historically, Francesco Valori headed the new Signoria as Gonfalonier of Justice which entered office in January 1497.<sup>87</sup> He had played a leading role in the overthrow of the Medici and emerged as the leader of the pro-Savonarolan political faction, the *frateschi*.<sup>88</sup> For this reason, Revere uses him as his protagonist, since he needed a brave, anti-medicean, well-known historical figure who is devoted to the Friar, to cajole and move the public, and have it accept the principles of self sacrifice and patriotism. Valori, like all the heroes we have previously discussed, is ready to die, and will die, for his cause. When he calls for his fellow Florentines to unite and serve God and their state, we see the embodiment of Savonarolan principles:

Sebbene abbandonati dalla Francia e minacciati dal papa, i Fiorentini uniti e fedeli a Dio e al loro reggimento civile, avrebbero potuto ancora trionfare.<sup>89</sup>

Valori, speaking of unity, reminds us that, for the nationalist writers to achieve their goal of creating a free and united Italy, they had to make their readers realise that self interest and apathy would lead to more years of foreign rule. Revere's readers would have wanted to identify with Francesco Valori. In his first long and emotional plea in act I,<sup>90</sup> he warns his fellow *piagnoni* that the city will fall because Florentines are fighting each other. We also hear Revere, the nationalist author, pleading with his compatriots to unite and fight to secure a free and independent Italy:

Questa Firenze, che ora volge i denti in sé stessa, si lacera le viscere colle proprie mani, e adopera tutta la sottigliezza degli ingegni suoi a prepararsi le

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<sup>87</sup> See D. Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*, p. 269.

<sup>88</sup> Piero Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, ed. Joseph Schnitzer, vol. IV, (Leipzig, 1910), p. 154, as cited by D. Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*, p. 269.

<sup>89</sup> Giuseppe Revere, *I piagnoni e gli arrabbiati*, vol. I, p. 107.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.121-124.

catene! ... Ma noi abbiamo stentato, pugnato e vinto, sicché Italia fu chiara che noi non siamo nati per viver servi, e che all'ingegno fiorentino risponde il nobile e generoso ardimento dell'animo.<sup>91</sup>

It is interesting to note that Revere couples *Firenze* and *Italia*, just as Guerrazzi and D'Azeglio do in their works, in order to further emphasise to his readers that the events of 1498 are of relevance to the Italians of the Risorgimento. The Savonarolan spirit of independence must be carried through to the nineteenth century if Italy is to fulfil its destiny and emerge unified and free. When Valori implores his fellow *piagnoni* to support and defend Savonarola as the city's future and its freedom lie with him: "Adoperiamo dunque di aiutare e difendere il padre Girolamo, giacché in lui è la libertà di Firenze,"<sup>92</sup> Revere emphasises that Italy can be unified only if it embraces Savonarolan ideals and is prepared to undergo both a moral and spiritual regeneration. Francesco Valori, courageous fighter, statesman, husband, father, devout man of God and ardent follower of Savonarola represents the good and virtuous element of Florence. He is the experienced fighter to whom the other noble characters in the play turn and on whom they rely. When the enemy forces arrive at San Marco, it is Valori who is talking to Savonarola, pleading with him to remain safe as the future of Florence rests with him:

Padre, se amate ancora la nostra Firenze ... abbiate cura della vita vostra, nella quale sta ancora tutta la nostra libertà. Il vostro martirio porterà con sé la rovina della nostra città: gli è vero che voi guadagnerete il cielo, ma i nostri miseri cittadini perderanno quel che v'ha di più caro in terra, di più desiderato in mezzo ai tempi vigliacchi che corrono.<sup>93</sup>

In truly heroic fashion, Valori has no concerns for his own welfare, declaring, time and again, that he would willingly give his life for Florentine liberty:

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 8.

Il Signore faccia che la mia vecchiaia discenda nella fossa, prima che io vegga  
il guasto della nostra povera terra.<sup>94</sup>

For *I piagnoni e gli arrabbiati* to have had any influence on the public, it had to be gripping and enjoyable and, to this end, Revere creates a number of colourful and interesting characters. The young *piagnone*, Sandro, is the symbol of youthful exuberance and idealism. As Valori uses his passionate speeches to instruct and motivate Sandro, we see that Sandro is also a symbol, in a wider sense, of the nineteenth-century people of the Peninsula. Although he knows that the ultimate goal is a free and united people and is prepared to die for it, he is impetuous and does not quite know how to go about trying to achieve his aims. He is willing to fight at any given moment yet he possesses none of the astuteness and experience of the older and wiser Valori. Sandro is devoted to Savonarola - “Padre, mettetevi in salvo, e lasciateci morire per voi- ”<sup>95</sup> - and would gladly give his life for his beliefs and his city, yet his actions are hasty and ill considered. Revere uses Sandro as an instructive tool to tell his countrymen that they must be organised, as well as brave and fearless if they are to realise their nationalistic dreams.

The love story between Sandro and Lena, although often complicated and overly dramatic, is a welcome relief in the otherwise dark and brooding drama. Their union is doomed from the start as Lena is the daughter of the die-hard *arrabbiato*, Vanni Cartolaio. He is devoid of any attractive human attributes and, in him, Revere creates a truly evil, if somewhat fascinating, character. He shows no respect for God, for his wife and daughter or for himself. In portraying him as a one dimensional, ignorant character, Revere heightens the contrast between the Savonarolan inspired characters in the play. Vanni forbids Lena from associating with Sandro and would rather banish her than see her with a *piagnone*. Vanni’s

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 233.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 44

language is coarse and often quite vulgar and Revere uses him not only as an example of the extreme emotion which was evident in Florence during this time, but also as comic relief throughout the play. Vanni is not only an example of the lower class *arrabbiato* but he is also, in many respects, a caricature of an *arrabbiato* whose statements, such as his descriptions of marriage and all the tribulations it entails, can induce laughter but also contempt:

Va là, che ti farò cantar domani io...Ti dico, Lotto, che l'aver moglie è una di quelle doglie di testa...di quelle doglie che il medico non sa guarire; la più smisurata disgrazia che possa toccare ad un pover uomo: le sono il diavolo in casa queste maladette donne, e per aver un briciolo di pace, ti conviene di stare coll'arme in mano tutto il dí. Oh, la fu un gran brutta invenzione il matrimonio.<sup>96</sup>

Revere ensures, however, that any humour we may find in many of Vanni's words is quickly replaced with anxiety for his daughter and for his wife and, indeed, for the whole of Florence. Vanni represents the irrational and angry element of Florence, consumed by a hatred for Savonarola and for his followers which divides the city and ultimately leads to its downfall. Vanni's house and family is a metaphor for Florence: it is bitterly divided with no hope of reconciliation. On the one side is Vanni, the implacable father, unable and unwilling to accept the honourable Sandro into his home because he is a *piagnone*. On the other, is his daughter, frightened of her father yet also unwilling to compromise her principles, her belief in Savonarola and his teachings. She loves Sandro and would rather die than marry Lotto, an *arrabbiato* and the man her father has chosen for her. The situation is dire. A resolution appears impossible and it is inevitable that Vanni's family, like Florence, will remain divided. This is clearly seen by Vanni who declares to Lotto:

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 59.

La non ti vuole, e si lascerà accoppiare anziché pigliarti a marito, perché s'è fitta col pensiero in quel graffiasanti scomunicato d'un Sandro, il quale me le ha da pagar tutte ... Ribaldo! E' mi ha messo l'inferno in casa, lui! Ho la ribellione nel letto quando dormo, e quando metto in bocca quel po' di mangiare, e la piccola famiglia mia divisa in tante sette come Firenze.<sup>97</sup>

Lena must choose between her father and her beliefs. Lena's mother, Menica must also choose between her husband and her daughter. As Sandro, planning secretly to marry Lena, orders the frightened Menica to choose: "Scegliete, o madre di Sandro e della Lena, o moglie di Vanni,"<sup>98</sup> we hear echoes of the choice that the patriotic writers were asking their readers to make. They are telling their audience that there is no room for vacillation as they are either supporters of the unification of Italy or enemies of it.

The introduction of Lena, Vanni's daughter, into the work is an excellent dramatic play. In addition to adding to the popular appeal of the work by introducing an interesting and complicated love story, Revere gives us a young and principled woman. She is a heroine worthy of our admiration, willing to defy her father, place her own life and that of her mother in danger in order to remain true to her beliefs. From the outset, Revere presents Lena as virtuous and strong and the reader is immediately sympathetic towards her. As a result of her intransigence, she is banished from the family home yet through it all, she remains strong and declares that she would rather live alone and penniless as a virtuous, God fearing woman than downtrodden in her father's home.

ma io vi dico che non porrò più il piede in casa nostra ... No, poiché sarebbe perdere l'anima ed il corpo; stenterò la vita, ma morirò fanciulla virtuosa e timorata d'Iddio.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 60.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

She does not waver in her devotion to Savonarolan ideals and fights for them. What characterises her and the other Savonarolan inspired characters in the play is their unwillingness to compromise their beliefs, despite the gravity of the consequences. Like many of the virtuous characters we have seen, Lena ultimately loses a great deal to the struggle. In the end, her father disowns her; her beloved Sandro is murdered by his enemies; Savonarola, whom she revered and who has conditioned her life, is put to death, and her city is divided. Her sacrifices are huge and we feel her sorrow and her loss. Revere, through Lena, is telling his readers that this is the sort of courage and determination necessary to affect change and see the creation of a new and liberated nation.

Revere's aim was to present models of patriotic behaviour through Savonarola and his followers. By setting the play in Savonarola's lifetime, he is able to bring the Friar to life, using him to drive and guide a people. Savonarola is the hero of Revere's work and he is present, either directly or indirectly, in every scene adding weight to Revere's religious and moral messages.

The sombre and compelling words of the Friar permeate the play as he speaks of the need for a free, united city and of the struggle that is necessary for that to be achieved:

Ahimé! La pianta della verità non può fruttare senza pioggia di sangue, perché gli uomini materiali non credono se non che a' dolori della persona, di questo strumento di fango, nimico dell'anima immortale.<sup>100</sup>

Savonarola is willing to die for his cause and for his city. He often tells the people of Florence: "io son parato a morire per le mie pecorelle, né posso altro."<sup>101</sup> In this way, Revere is portraying Savonarola as the father figure and saviour of Florence - "In lui è la

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

libertà di Firenze.”<sup>102</sup> The Friar compares himself to Christ; like Christ, he knows he will be betrayed and sacrificed.<sup>103</sup> This notion of self sacrifice and of martyrdom runs through the play and Revere uses it to good dramatic effect as the reader is led along by Savonarola’s words and predictions, knowing what his ultimate fate will be, but aware that had the citizens of Florence been united, the outcome could well have been very different. Savonarola’s dream for a free and united Florence, with Christ as supreme ruler, accords with Revere’s hopes for a free, Catholic Italy:

Oh Firenze! Io ti volli dare un governo simile a quello della Città celeste, nella quale ogni creatura è perfetta nei suoi termini, e dove cittadino non si leva sopra cittadino. E ti diedi Cristo, Cristo! Intendi, per tuo capo ... Gesù ama la verità, anzi n’è padre, e questi doveva essere il tuo re, o Firenze ...<sup>104</sup>

The final act of the play takes place in Piazza della Signoria on the day of Savonarola’s execution. The tone is sombre and the scene is powerful as we realise that the division in the city has exacted a very high price. Francesco Valori has been killed, so has Sandro; Lena and her mother have been banished, many other Florentine citizens have lost their lives and now, Savonarola is being put to death after having been betrayed by the very city he fought to save. As he, Fra Domenico and Fra Silvestro are led to the stake, Revere’s nationalistic message is given powerful dramatic voice. The description of the baying crowd, surrounding the Friar as he is about to be burned at the stake, highlights the betrayal of Savonarolan principles that led to his death and the death of Florentine freedom. Through this dramatic scene, Revere is appealing to his readers not to behave in the same way. Unlike the Florentines, they must display courage, determination and valour if they are to free the Peninsula and witness the birth of a new nation.

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>103</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

## V

The final work to be discussed is the historical play, *Francesco Valori*, written by Ermolao Rubieri in 1845 and published in 1848.<sup>105</sup> Like Revere's work, the play is set in Florence in 1498 and deals with the divisions within the city during this time. There is very little written on either the author or the play and it would appear that only one edition of the work was published. This paucity of information would indicate that it was not widely read and had none of the public appeal of the works previously discussed. However, it is important to look briefly at the play since it gives another example of how the figure of Savonarola was used by the authors of the Risorgimento to inspire a people and ready it for action. *Francesco Valori*'s storyline is simple. It deals with the heroic struggle of Savonarola and his followers, led by the protagonist, Francesco Valori, to uphold the ideals of liberty and freedom despite papal and Medicean tyranny. In order to render the play more widely attractive, Rubieri introduces a love story between Francesco Valori's daughter, the virtuous Gemma, and Tebaldo who, although aligned with the *arrabbiati*, is an honourable man. Not surprisingly, their love is doomed from the start since Valori would rather disown his daughter than accept an *arrabbiato* as his son-in-law. Rejection of compromise pervades the play - as it did in the three works already discussed - with Valori preferring to lose his daughter rather than allow her to marry a man he considers to be an enemy of the Florentine cause.

As a work of literature, the play is convoluted and difficult to follow. Rubieri's language is often contrived and cumbersome, preventing the work from having the same degree of popular appeal as the earlier works discussed in this chapter. He introduces numerous characters into his work who, although often entertaining and interesting, can at times, confuse the reader and obscure his message. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the play is

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<sup>105</sup> Ermolao Rubieri, *Francesco Valori*, (Florence, 1848).

worthy of note: it brings Savonarola to life, places him at the centre of the work and gives him the role of instructing nineteenth-century Italians on their duties and obligations. Indeed, as Rubieri tells us in his annotations to the play, the work's theme is liberty: "la causa della libertà di un popolo, nell'atto di esser decisa dalle virtù e dai vizi di quei che lo compongono- ecco il gran subietto del dramma."<sup>106</sup> Savonarola is seen as the great defender of liberty, the father figure and protector of Florence, a man of God who defies the authorities and the Church and who never compromises his beliefs. Throughout the play, the Friar often declares that he is not concerned with his own fate, only with that of his beloved Florence. Like the other authors already examined, Rubieri reveals his current political intents by often having Savonarola employ *Firenze* and *Italia* interchangeably:

Ma, Italia, io t'amo, e vo' giovarti ... per me nulla chiegg'io; ma, per quel sacro amor di patria io ti scongiuro – riedi tra i muri di Firenze! Io già non tremo per me; ma in ogni evento, ah, che non resti senza guida la plebe!<sup>107</sup>

Savonarola is concerned that Florence needs a guide who can steer it towards moral redemption and liberty. Similarly, Rubieri knows that his readers need guidance if they are to come together and form a new and united Italy. He turns to Savonarola to provide it.

Most of Rubieri's characters are one dimensional and are presented as either villains or heroes. Each of the main characters, moreover, is used to instruct the reader in one way or another. All this conspires to make the play hard-going and monotonous. Apart from Savonarola, Rubieri gives us another hero: the historical character, Francesco Valori, who is presented as an example of goodness and of bravery. Savonarola, Valori and their fellow *piagnoni* are defenders of liberty and represent the moral and intellectual force in the play. In direct contrast, the villains, Doffo Spini and Vincenzo Ridolfi, are seen as enemies of liberty

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

and examples of treachery and self interest. Throughout the play, the *popolo* is presented, once again, as the great mass which must be mobilised to ensure victory and Valori, their lay hero, is presented as the instrument of its mobilisation. From the outset, Rubieri establishes him as a man with whom the public must identify and whom they can respect. His influence in the city ensures that the people listen to him. Such is his standing that his dedication to the Friar is respected and, indeed, emulated, by many citizens of Florence, with one declaring: “Non lo ammira il Valori?...e chi può ingiusto sospettare un tant’uomo?”<sup>108</sup>

Whilst Rubieri drew heavily on historical sources to create nearly all of his characters, he also gives us the love struck Tebaldo; the only main character in the play who is totally fictitious. Rubieri tells us in his annotations to the play that he is:

l’emblema ideale di un giovane, virginea esistenza, degna di subire tuttora il prestigio di un tipo puro, etereo, perfetto d’amore (in Gemma), e di virtù (in Valori); tipo che il destino sembra aver già deciso di cancellar dalla terra ... è il palpito estremo d’un intempestivo eroismo, che finisce col fatalmente soccombere sotto il peso dei propri sforzi.<sup>109</sup>

Tebaldo is willing to lose everything in his love for Gemma. Although he is friendly with the leaders of the *arrabbiati*, he is not portrayed as a villain, but rather as a young, virtuous, honest man who happens to be in love with the ‘wrong’ woman. Rubieri uses him to good effect to show that it is the human spirit which is important, not merely one’s associations and, when he dies towards the end of the play, the reader mourns the loss of a gallant young man. In addition to being the central character in the play’s love story, the popular concession of the work, Tebaldo also serves to highlight further the deep divisions in the city.

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

The play ends in highly dramatic fashion with all the heroes, except Gemma, dying. Although the play ends before Savonarola's execution, the reader is aware of his fate and the feeling at the end of the play is not dissimilar to that at the end of Revere's work: the lives of selfless men and women have been lost and, with their death, Florentine liberty has been extinguished.

As a patriotic piece, *Francesco Valori*, has none of the power of the other three works discussed. The author was not well known either as a literary figure or as a political one. The play is difficult to follow and the language is not as accessible as that of the other works. Although the work is obviously patriotic, the message is not clear. Rubieri does not offer his readers a political or military path to follow but rather tries to tell his readers that they must be prepared to undergo a moral and spiritual reassessment if they are to see a new Italy emerge. His plan for a change in the behaviour of the people is not as clearly outlined as Revere's and, as such, the work would not have had the same impact as Revere's play. However, the work undoubtedly contributed to the nationalistic movement and has Savonarola and his teachings at its centre. The lay hero is the uncompromising Valori and Rubieri asks his readers to follow the example of religious and lay protagonists and reject the vices displayed by their opponents. Although not as widely read as the other works examined, it is important to remember that Rubieri's *Francesco Valori* was written with a very similar, specific intent. The author aimed to bring about a change in the thoughts and ultimately the actions of every day Italians so that they may work towards the creation of a united and free nation. In so doing, Rubieri's work is yet another example of how the figure of Savonarola was used to inspire a people and set it on a new, dynamic course.

## VI

Death over dishonour and a willingness to sacrifice everything in the quest for the goal of freedom and the creation of a new Italy are common themes in the historical works discussed. By giving Italians such grand, heroic characters as Niccolò de' Lapi and Francesco Valori, the authors strove to instil passion and patriotism in a people that, in the past, had had no sense of, nor a desire for, nationhood. They were offering their nineteenth-century audience examples of virtue with which it could identify and told their readers that the aim of freedom and unification could be achieved only the collective will of the people.

The authors discussed all chose Savonarola as their exemplar. In the works of Guerrazzi and D'Azeglio, set during the siege, Savonarola's memory and influence are ever present through his devotees, the *piagnoni*. In Revere's and Rubieri's plays, however, Savonarola himself is the main character, sharing the stage with his heroic followers. But why did these authors chose Savonarola to arouse their nineteenth-century readers? As I have tried to demonstrate, they chose him because through him, they were able to outline models of behaviour and instruct their countrymen on what to do and, just as importantly, what not to do. As we have seen, all characters are presented as either villains or heroes and there is no room for ambiguity in their treatment. The models of behaviour presented by the authors are either positively or negatively reinforced by the characters in the works, who in turn are seen in relation to Savonarola and the principles and ideals for which he stood. As shown by D'Azeglio's wonderful character Niccolò, virtue, bravery and determination are essential elements in the struggle for liberty. In addition, as the authors continue to emphasise, the people must be steadfast in the face of adversity. Most importantly, it must be totally unwilling to compromise its principles, no matter what the consequences. This is the essence of the Savonarolan spirit which comes through so strongly in each of the works discussed.

The theme of intransigence pervades the works. Guerrazzi's Fra Benedetto is starved to death by Pope Alexander VI for refusing to compromise his beliefs. D'Azeglio's great hero, Niccolò, faced with losing his beloved daughter, does not waver in his determination. He banishes her rather than compromise his beliefs and see her marry a *pallesco*. Similarly, Revere's Lena, facing banishment from her own home, stands true to her principles, her devotion to Savonarola and her love for the *piagnone*, Sandro. In Rubieri's play, the great man Francesco Valori gladly fights to the death in order to uphold his beliefs and remain true to the Savonarolan ideals of liberty, freedom from oppression and rejection of tyranny.

The rejection of compromise is central to the works discussed since everything may have to be sacrificed in order to achieve the ultimate goal. Love of family, position in society, material possessions and one's own safety must all be put to one side, if necessary, for Italy's sake. To compromise is to betray the cause of freedom. This was the reason for choosing Savonarola. His unwavering devotion, his outspoken views, his determination to fight against oppression and tyranny and his ultimate death at the hands of his enemies, made him the perfect choice to present to the people of the Risorgimento.

The authors used their works as weapons in the nineteenth-century battle for independence and as a call to arms for the people of the Peninsula. We need to ask, however, why did the authors choose Florence as the setting for their works? How did a city which aligned itself with the French and which was totally opposed to the Italian League come to be used as an example for the rest of the Peninsula? How did an episode, such as the siege come to be used as a weapon in the fight for Italy to be freed? As we have seen, the siege of Florence in 1529-1530, a siege led by the Spanish, imperial and papal armies, lent itself perfectly to the presentation of perseverance and bravery in a people. Similarly, Florence's divisions and struggles during Savonarola's final years were a perfect setting for Revere's and Rubieri's

plays since they enabled the authors to highlight the Friar's messages of courage and determination, whilst presenting the evil consequences of the divisive behaviour of his opponents. It is interesting to note, however, that the whole issue of Florence's abandonment of the League, and its refusal to rejoin it, is totally disregarded by all the authors. To have done otherwise would have weakened the writers' message and would have placed emphasis on the fact that there had never been an Italy in the past but a collection of warring states, hostile to one another. The writers, in contrast, wanted to convey the impression that Italians were always united in spirit. Even Guerrazzi and D'Azeglio, who wanted a lay, anticlerical democratic nation to emerge, shied away from delivering overt anti-papal messages. If we consider that the first three works were published before 1848 and that the authors would have been influenced by Gioberti's neo-Guelf presentation of the question of unification in his *Del primato moral e civile degli italiani*,<sup>110</sup> we see that there was still hope that the pope, Pius IX, would join the cause of Italian unification, and the authors would not have wanted to jeopardise this possibility by being openly critical of the papacy. The writers did not want to create the impression that some Italian states were actively against unification since they needed to convey the impression that the real and sole enemy was the Austrians.

Examples of virtues to be imitated and vices to be rejected abound in the works. The authors are instructing their readers and offering them moral, ethical and political guides so that, in turn, the political and moral redemption of Italy may be achieved. Theirs is an appeal for renewal and reform. The writers' message is clear and strong: Italians must be willing to fight and perhaps to lose everything in the struggle for freedom. They must choose between honesty and treachery, between perseverance and capitulation, between valour and cowardice. They must never compromise their beliefs and they must be unwavering in their devotion to their cause. In essence, the authors offer Savonarola as the great teacher and as

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<sup>110</sup> Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani*, (Brussels, 1845).

the model for Italians to follow. The authors strove to change the hearts and minds of Italians, hoping that the depiction of the Florentine struggle would inspire a people and bring it together. When D'Azeglio writes,

È cosa che stringe il cuore, veder tanta moltitudine di cittadini, insieme colle donne e persin co' fanciulli, risolver tutti con tanto ardore di volger il viso alla fortuna, affrontar con tanta prontezza d'animo i rischi d'una lotta cotanto impari, i disagi, la fame, le ferite, la morte, piuttosto che soffrire un'ingiustizia, e pensar poi a qual fine doveva riuscir tanta virtù.<sup>111</sup>

he is echoing the views of all the authors as he implores his readers, young and old, men and women, to be motivated by the past and work to create a new and better future, despite the sacrifices that will inevitably be asked of them. Indeed, the authors realised that the road to unification would not be easy as they needed to bring about a change in the minds and behaviour of the people. Massimo D'Azeglio voiced their concerns when he famously declared after unification in 1861:

I più pericolosi nemici d'Italia, non sono i Tedeschi, sono gl'Italiani. E perché? Per la ragione che gl'Italiani hanno voluto far un'Italia nuova, e loro rimanere gl'Italiani vecchi di prima.<sup>112</sup>

The authors examined chose the medium of fiction to convey their messages. They realised that the fictional treatment of such vital themes enabled them to present a much stronger case than would have been possible through other means. It allowed them to highlight issues and events which strengthened their arguments, while glossing over problems and facts which might have weakened or undermined them. They were also able to manipulate characters and dramatic situations to suit their purposes. Above all, this fictional approach enabled them to acquire a much longer readership than would have been the case had they made their appeals through treatises or proclamations, not least because fiction did not unduly attract the

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<sup>111</sup> Massimo D'Azeglio, *Romanzi*, p. 264.

<sup>112</sup> Massimo D'Azeglio, *Ricordi, opere varie*, p. 87.

attention of the ever vigilant censors. All of the fictional works discussed were written with a very similar objective. Unification was the ultimate goal, but the authors and their fellow patriots knew that the struggle could not stop there as the people had to learn to think of themselves in a new, collective way for a free nation to emerge.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Savonarola and Liberal Italy**

## I

Massimo D’Azeglio famously declared after unification that, having made a new Italy, it was necessary to make new Italians.<sup>1</sup> However, D’Azeglio’s and his fellow nationalists’ dream of a united, cohesive people inhabiting the new, unified Peninsula, was not realised. Although the legal State finally existed after 1861, it failed to secure the support of the people. The very idea of Italy as a unified nation meant little to the vast majority of the population and, indeed, was an “extraneous reality to most Italians.”<sup>2</sup> Martin Clark suggests the reason that the ‘legal Italy’ was weak perhaps lay in society, “in the complex, incoherent diversity of the *real Italy*.”<sup>3</sup> This new Italy, although brought together by the tenacity, foresight, perseverance and bloodshed of a number of determined patriots, was still characterised by its social, ethnic, linguistic and ideological diversities. It still consisted of a number of different regional societies with different economies, values and ways of life. There was no universal common language. The distribution of wealth between individuals and, more markedly, between the north and the south was very disparate. The Church, hostile to the new State, was another reason for the lack of public cohesion in the post unification years. In addition, the building of this new nation was hampered by economic backwardness, by clerical hostility, and by the fact that most Italians could neither read nor write.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Italy seemed to be comprised of a number of disaffected groups, each vying for a voice in the newly created legal nation.

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<sup>1</sup> It is widely accepted that D’Azeglio never uttered the exact and often ‘quoted’ words: "Ora che l'Italia è fatta, bisogna fare gli italiani." What he did say, in his memoirs, is: “il primo bisogno d’Italia è che si formino Italiani che sappiano adempiere il loro dovere; quindi che si formino alti e forti caratteri.” Massimo D’Azeglio, *Ricordi e opere varie*, (Milan, 1969), p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Rosario Romeo, “Stato e società prima e dopo l’unificazione”, in *La formazione dello stato unitario*, edited by Francesco Vito, (Milan, 1963), p. 106, quoted in Geoffrey A. Haywood, *Failure of a Dream, Sidney Sonnino and the Rise and Fall of Liberal Italy, 1847-1922*, (Florence, 1999), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871-1982*, (London, 1984), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Unification delivered a new, free nation, as the patriots had promised. Italy was finally an entity unto itself, free from the shackles of Austrian power, a true Liberal State. Its leaders, however, did not consider unification to have been completed. Rome and the Papal states were still ruled by the Pope. The Veneto, Trentino, Alto Adige, Trieste-Istria and some coastal cities in Dalmatia inhabited by Italians were still under Austrian rule. The leaders of the new Italy claimed these *terre irredente* and continued the campaign to occupy them. The dream of the Risorgimento to incorporate these regions into the new nation was realised only with the First World War. Distracted by these aims, the new Italy did not deliver the wealth and prosperity it had promised. Economically, the State went backwards and the South, in particular, became more impoverished. This new Italy was not concerned with the welfare of the people, nor with improving the population's social and economic circumstances. The remarkable nature of unification had created a febrile atmosphere, where the memory of the sacrifices of the patriots was still strong and the desire to affirm Italy as a free, lay nation and establish it as a powerful and great player on the international stage was of priority to the ruling élite.<sup>5</sup> The new leaders still clung to the glories of Rome and of the Renaissance, inextricably linking them with the wonder of the Risorgimento. The astute political manoeuvrings of Cavour, the heroism of Garibaldi and the fact that unification was achieved rapidly and at astonishingly low cost in human life,<sup>6</sup> all served to imbue Italian Liberalism with a "voluntarist, miracle making strain."<sup>7</sup>

It is not surprising, considering this charged environment, that only 5 years after unification, Italy stood on the brink of its first war, against the Austrian foe. The Liberal governing élite's determination to complete unification was a major impulse for this war. It determined that

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<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey A. Haywood, *Failure of a Dream*, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> The total casualties of the regular and volunteer forces between 1848 and 1870 have been estimated at 6,000 dead and 20,000 wounded. Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, London, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey A. Haywood, *Failure of a Dream*, p. 36.

recovering the Italian speaking territories in the north still under Austrian control was a major factor in realising this goal. In addition, Victor Emmanuel II, “driven by Savoyard military traditions, personal vanity and an absurd over-estimation of Italy’s strength, had been in restless quest of a victorious war for years.”<sup>8</sup> Even though the Italian military was under equipped, poorly trained and ineptly led,<sup>9</sup> no time had been wasted in moving this newly formed nation towards a conflict which the ruling élite felt could propel the State to achieve the Risorgimento dream of full unification and international prestige.<sup>10</sup>

The State’s preoccupation with military build-up and with the acquisition of a colonial empire led to massive industrialisation which meant that the situation for many Italians worsened dramatically. In the 1880s, the State undertook huge investment in steel making, shipping and railways and the decade saw the State become heavily involved in the modernisation of the nation. However, much of Italy’s growth was purchased at great cost and was also gained, to a certain extent, at the expense of the South. Tariffs and taxes increased enormously. Free trade, which had seemed a natural progression for the Liberal State, did not offer protection to local industry and thus had disastrous effects. Indeed, the State’s policies on trading arrangements and tariffs can generally be seen to have caused not only the rapid economic growth of the 1880s, but also the sudden and deep depression of the late 1880s and 1890s.<sup>11</sup>

Disease also hampered the economic prosperity of the new Liberal State, especially in the South.<sup>12</sup> Peasants often lived in basic mud huts with no flooring and straw roofs which often

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<sup>8</sup> Denis Mack Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy*, New Haven, 1989, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion on this war, see G. Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War: Austria’s war with Prussia and Italy in 1866*, (Cambridge, 1996), chapter 8.

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey A. Haywood, *Failure of a Dream*, p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> O. Vitali, *Aspetti dello sviluppo economico italiano alla luce della ricostruzione della popolazione attiva*, Rome, 1970, pp. 160-162.

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey A. Haywood, *Failure of a Dream*, pp. 80-82.

housed animals and people. Understandably, standards of hygiene were poor and potable water rarely available. Not surprisingly, epidemic diseases were common with cholera, typhoid, scarlet fever, small pox, diphtheria, tuberculosis and, above all, malaria killing thousands. Because mosquitoes infected the coastal plains and the river valleys, massive tracts of potentially fertile land could not be cultivated throughout the summer.<sup>13</sup>

The prosperity of the new nation was being undermined in yet another, very serious way. The problems outlined above led many people to flee their homeland and seek an improved way of life abroad. Mass emigration was now a real issue and, by the mid 1870s, had reached unprecedented proportions.<sup>14</sup> Although large-scale emigration was viewed by some as a safeguard against social unrest,<sup>15</sup> most saw it as a direct challenge to the State since many of Italy's young, healthy workers were leaving the Peninsula, choosing not to be a part of the 'dream' which had so fervently been promised to them but which, up until that point, they were still waiting for.

Unification also failed to deliver the political stability and unity it had promised. The country was politically divided as the Socialists and Anarchists all aimed to provide alternatives to the Liberal system of government. Protests, riots and strikes were not infrequent and vocal dissent, especially amongst the social élite, was increasing. In order to deal with protest and opposition, the State used its police, courts, and army to suppress dissent and unrest.<sup>16</sup> Restricted franchise limited political solutions. Political influence was coming to rest more and more on local power which led to inconsistencies in governance and eventually to corruption and further public disaffection.

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871-1992*, p. 21. Clark refers the reader to Enrico Pani Rosso's book on Basilicata, *La Basilicata*, Verona, 1868, p. 253.

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey A. Haywood, *Failure of a Dream*, pp. 87-89. Also, for a more detailed discussion on Italian emigration at this time, see R. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times*, New York, 1969.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871-1992*, pp. 66-67.

In addition to the economic and political problems discussed, unification drove Church and State further apart than they had been during the Risorgimento. The relationship between the Church and the State collapsed entirely after the occupation of Rome and of the Papal states in 1870. Not until the Gentiloni Pact of 1913 and, more importantly, the Lateran Pacts of 1929<sup>17</sup> were the Church and State able to effect some reconciliation. Until then, the Vatican was vehemently opposed to the new State and, as a consequence, Italy was divided and weakened by this hostility. The Church became a subversive entity and its influence on society and her role in it were constant sources of hostile political debate since it was seen as a direct threat to the progression of the Liberal State.<sup>18</sup> In order to combat its power and influence on the young, a lay educational system was established; civil marriage was introduced, legal separation could be granted by the civil courts and various attempts were made in parliament to introduce a divorce law.<sup>19</sup> The State legislated and prohibited pilgrimages, military service was introduced for priests, and many ecclesiastical properties were expropriated, drastically reducing the Church's capacity to dispense assistance to the poor. The State adopted a new, modern, lay way of thinking which, it argued, was necessary for progress. The Church, naturally, resisted the new modernist trends which affected not only the social, but the religious spheres. The main result was that the more traditional aspects of religious life, such as the contemplative, monastic communities were discouraged or suppressed by the government. It is interesting to note that the revival of Italian Catholicism in the late nineteenth century and the rise of the Catholic lay movement owed much to the anticlerical laws of the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See following chapter for a discussion on the Lateran Pacts and the relationship between Fascism and the Church.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, London, 1967, pp. 219-222.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871-1992*, pp. 80-82.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-86.

All these issues prevented the government from tackling the pressing problems of the welfare of the people. The indifference of government to the economic duress of Italians was evidenced by the increasingly high taxes, the lack of a proper health policy, the absence of concern for the exploitation of workers and the refusal to address the needs of many women, children and peasants. The government ignored these crucial aspects of Italian life, concentrating all its energies on completing the Risorgimento aim of continuing with the task of unifying Italy and, at the same time, of establishing it as a military and colonial power. For the first twenty years of the new nation's life, its leaders were almost solely concerned with these aims, pursuing them single-mindedly, to the detriment of the welfare of the Italian people.

## II

In this charged environment Savonarola was called upon once again to inspire Italians and call them to action. However, the role that he was asked to play is different from any other we have seen. He was not merely put forward as an example of unwavering determination, strength and conviction in the face of adversity. Nor were Italians asked to consider only his virtues, passion and readiness to sacrifice all to achieve their ends. In these early years of Liberal Italy, a figure was needed who would show Italians and the country's ruling classes, that in order to be great, Italy needed to be aggressive. To achieve her dreams of prosperity and prestige, Italy needed to free herself not only from foreign rule, but from the oppressive and constraining grip of the Church. It was not enough to rule with faith and love alone. Discipline, strength and courage were needed in order for Italy to become a powerful liberal, lay state. For these reasons, in the first work to be discussed, Salvatore Mormone's

*Savonarola, Tragedia in cinque atti*,<sup>21</sup> Savonarola is presented not only as a figure to be emulated for his moral and spiritual rectitude, but also as a negative example: as someone who could have accomplished much more had he chosen to arm himself with more than just faith. In this work, he is presented as someone who held enormous sway and influence over the people but who, ultimately, failed because he chose not to resort to force to fight his enemies. In his struggle with the Borgia Pope and his allies, Savonarola was unwilling to arm himself with anything more than his own faith, love and conviction, and this intransigence is presented as his ultimate undoing. This work calls on Italians to reject Savonarola's example in this respect and to drop religious notions of love and tolerance in their fight against their enemies. Instead, it conveys the message that for Italy to be a great and powerful nation, Italians need to be aggressive and militaristic. For a unified Italy to realise her dreams of national expansion and glory, the evangelical notions that Savonarola subscribed to had to be rejected.

If we consider that Mormone first published *Savonarola, Tragedia in cinque atti*, in 1862, his choice of Savonarola as protagonist for his work becomes quite clear. Directly after unification, in an environment which was highly charged with the memory of victory and with the grand plans for a greater, stronger nation, Mormone found in Savonarola the perfect figure through which to portray the need, not only for strength of character and intransigence, but for the use of armed force to achieve even greater national aims. These same issues were responsible for the play's revival in 1877. By this time, much of the enthusiasm derived from unification had faded. The war with Austria in 1866 had been fought and lost,<sup>22</sup> and had left many feeling disillusioned and embittered. The conquest of Rome in 1870, so long

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<sup>21</sup> Salvatore Mormone, *Savonarola, Tragedia in cinque atti*, (Naples, 1877). This play was first written and published in 1862 and was re published in 1877. To my knowledge, only the 1877 publication is available and there is no indication in the text that changes were made from the 1862 edition.

<sup>22</sup> Italian forces were poorly trained and ill equipped and suffered defeat on land at Custoza and at sea near the Adriatic island of Lissa, but nonetheless, because of Prussia's victory over Austria, Italy was awarded the Veneto.

yearned for, was inglorious and did little to restore national pride. Italy had a large army, but it was not taken seriously by other European nations. As Clark asks: “could she ever become a really unified nation without a successful war?”<sup>23</sup> Although this call to arms took different forms - at times it was anti-Austrian, at others anti-French and, more and more it was directed at colonial expansion - the notion of military expansion for national prestige was ever present and foremost in the minds of Liberal Italy’s ruling élite. This is the context in which Mormone decided to republish his work in 1877. In so doing, he placed Savonarola back on the political agenda and used him to convey his political message. As we will see, Mormone was not interested in Savonarola as the great religious, social and moral reformer. There is no allusion in his work to the welfare of the people, their social circumstances or for the need to improve their situation. His work is mainly concerned with Savonarola’s anti-tyrannical stance and his ultimately unsuccessful struggle against the might of the Papacy.

Very little is known about Salvatore Mormone and an extensive search failed to produce any details on his life. In addition, there is no information on how the play was first received in 1862. Fortunately, the 1877 edition of his work includes a brief introduction, addressed, “A chi legge” which sheds some light on him and on his reasons for re-publishing the play 15 years after its original appearance. Mormone also tells us that the play, “un lavoro della mia verde giovinezza,”<sup>24</sup> together with two other works he penned in the same year, were never staged and, indeed, barely read:

A! *Savonarola* che non si poté rappresentare e fu appena letto, tennero dietro due altri lavori che ebbero la stessa sorte; ecco tutto il mio bagaglio letterario dal 1862 a questo anno di grazia ...<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871-1982*, p. 47.

<sup>24</sup> Salvatore Mormone, *Savonarola*, introduction, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

In addition, the introduction also includes an interesting letter, written to Mormone in 1863, by Niccolò Tommaseo. Tommaseo (1802-1874), Italian linguist, essayist and writer, was a very influential nineteenth-century literary figure and it is quite fascinating to consider that Mormone's little known play attracted his attention. Indeed, Mormone tells us in his introduction that it is only due to Tommaseo's sincere evaluation of his work, upon reading the 1862 edition of the play, that he agreed to the work being republished in 1877:

... se faccio ristampare il *Savonarola*, non è che io presuma assai di esso e di chi lo scrisse. No, tutto contrario avviso, da quel di pria, ora porto sull'uno e sull'altro. E non seppi resistere al cortese dimando dell'egregio editore; perché la parola sincera ed autorevole di un venerando vecchio mi confortava di credere tuttavia in qualche merito della mia povera tragedia.<sup>26</sup>

Whilst Tommaseo tells the twenty two year old playwright that such a lengthy drama shows promise, he also criticises both the structure and content of the play. Essentially, in his instruction to the young writer, Tommaseo tells him that he is attempting to fit too much into his work, forgetting that the play is still a piece of drama, to be enjoyed by both reader and audience alike. Mormone, so Tommaseo suggested, in choosing Savonarola as protagonist, must be careful in what he selects to dramatise since the Friar's life is far too involved, his teachings and writings too vast, to incorporate into one, single piece of theatre:

Ma il soggetto, bello alla storia, non è arrendevole al dramma. Difficile dar poeticamente a conoscere chi è troppo noto storicamente; difficile far parlare chi parlò e scrisse molto.<sup>27</sup>

Admittedly, the Catholic Tommaseo would not have agreed with Mormone's vision of a free, lay Italy and this difference of opinion would have coloured his reading of the work. Indeed, Mormone himself tells us that whilst he was initially stung by the criticism, the fact that Tommaseo was an ardent Catholic offered some consolation:

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Mi ricorda che a leggere tai cose, sentii *sbollire* in me l'entusiasmo; e davami pace pensando alle opinioni religiose del Tommaseo, liberale sì ma cattolico ardente.<sup>28</sup>

Although I do not think Savonarola's life cannot be successfully dramatised, one need only consider the highly popular work by Alessi (see following chapter), I do agree with Tommaseo's assessment of Mormone's *Savonarola*. The play, at times beautifully written, is, on the whole, cumbersome and far too detailed to have been well received. In his attempt to depict the final tumultuous months of the Friar's life, whilst also delivering an entertaining piece of drama, Mormone incorporates too many characters with stories of their own, at times rendering the play confusing and convoluted.

Typical of classically styled tragedy, the work comprises 5 acts and, as is common in Italian plays, employs hendecasyllabic verse (11 syllables per line with the final stress on the tenth syllable). The language is dramatic and the theme of the individual against the established order is present throughout the entire work. Considering when it was written and the ample use of exclamation marks and strong language, it would be easy to think that Mormone had chosen to style his work on those of Alfieri. However, despite these similarities, the play is not Alfierian in style since it is not a pure, classical tragedy. Alfieri's plays are devoted to one plot, have few characters, are austere in structure and all scenes directly follow each other with all action concerned specifically with the main plot. Mormone's *Savonarola*, with its various sub-plots and love intrigues, is much more Shakespearean in style. Indeed, the opening lines of the play introduce Maria and her agony at having been betrothed to one, whilst in love with another. In addition, the story of sibling rivalry and, in turn, loyalty between Maria and Bettino, together with the appealing character of the young Bianca, would have all been added to offer further dramatic appeal. However, the actual effect of these

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

inclusions, together with the numerous long and detailed monologues, is to overwhelm and lay down the work.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings and its subsequent lack of popular success, the play's significance should not be discounted since it is an important example of how the character of Savonarola was used in that period to further a particular political agenda. Mormone's *Savonarola* gives us an interesting account of the final months of the Friar's life, and closes on the day of his execution. Throughout the play, we are constantly exposed to the contrast between the Savonarolan ideal that a perfect society can be achieved purely through prayer and good works and the opposite view, forcefully expressed by Machiavelli, one of the protagonists, that arms and force are also needed in a well-ordered state. Savonarola provides examples of virtue, honesty, good behaviour and Christian values. Savonarola also maintains, in the face of massive adversity, that only love, faith and fierce determination were required to overcome opposition and lead Florence and Italy to their true destiny. In the end, however, Savonarola's fate, his ultimate defeat, undermines his own message and it is this contrast between the man of God and the man versed in the affairs of the world which is the powerful, recurring theme of the work.

From the outset, Mormone establishes that Savonarola's hold and influence over the Florentines is waning and that they are beginning, not only to question him, but to turn on him. When the fierce *arrabbiato*, Dolfo Spina,<sup>29</sup> declares that victory will result only if the people are united against Savonarola – “concordi tutti, uniti vittoria avrem!”,<sup>30</sup> Mormone is highlighting that the Friar is losing the struggle because he is unable to maintain control over the Florentines and they are becoming divided. Savonarola is waging a non-violent battle,

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<sup>29</sup> It appears that Mormone has erred in calling his character Dolfo Spina since this famous *arrabbiato*'s name was Doffo Spini.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

arming himself with spiritual weapons and eschewing force to achieve his ends. When Dolfo then states that the battle he is fighting will be “sanguinosa”<sup>31</sup>, the contrast between Savonarola’s methods and those of his adversaries is strikingly apparent.

Throughout the play, Mormone presents us with an interesting dilemma: the Savonarolan example of good behaviour and moral conduct, based on the strict adherence to Christian values, is clearly something which all people should aim to emulate and which, if followed, should lead to a better, happier society. However, Savonarola’s enemies, from the Borgia Pope through to his varied allies, employ violent, deceptive and totally unchristian means to fight the Friar and it is they who ultimately triumph as the people decide to follow them and reject the Savonarolan way. Despite this, Mormone praises Savonarola, the dedicated man of God, throughout the play and the reader is constantly induced to sympathise with him, willing the situation to be different even though we know his fate is sealed. Savonarola champions truth, believing to the end that it will triumph even if he must sacrifice his life fighting to uphold it. When he stoically declares:

... ma trionfi il vero;  
Poi che il vero favello [...]  
Non mi vedrai  
Piegar la fronte, o allontanar dal labbro  
Il calice di morte.<sup>32</sup>

we admire his strength and unwavering determination, but we despair, knowing that not even this moral fortitude is enough to ensure him victory. He is defeated by forces which he is unable to combat since he is not willing to compromise his conduct in any way and resort to behaviour which sits outside his strict moral code.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Mormone strengthens Savonarola's messages of hope, love and faith through the character of the great *piagnone*, Francesco Valori. In his dedication to Savonarola and all that he is fighting for, Francesco is presented as an example of fierce loyalty and bravery, as well as a champion of Florentine liberty. Whilst he does not play a major part in the play, his appearances are always charged with a great sense of purpose and self sacrifice, serving to contrast, once again, the goodness and virtue of the Savonarolan way with the moral bankruptcy of those who sought to destroy it. When Valori tenderly but proudly says to Savonarola:

La tua mano  
Posa sul capo mio. Deh! vi richiama  
Il celeste favor! S'aduna in breve  
Il popolar concesso, e là mi reco  
A difender la patria dalle inique  
Arti di Roma e de' patrizi.<sup>33</sup>

we can do little but admire his unrelenting belief and courage, knowing that, indeed, it is the Church's "iniquitous arts" which contribute greatly to its victory.

As has been mentioned, Mormone offers us various minor characters throughout the work who were probably included to lighten the work and give it more popular appeal. The unfortunate Maria, betrothed to Ridolfo but in love with Roberto, is also a loyal follower of Savonarola. Mormone turns her dedication and faith into a sub-plot of the drama as she is forced to choose between betraying her *arrabbiato* brother, Bettino, and saving the man she loves. Mormone's poetic skill and eloquent turn of phrase are fully displayed as he outlines Dolfo's and Bettino's plot, all overheard by Maria, to ambush and kill Savonarola, Valori and Roberto on their way to the trial by fire:

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

**Dolfo:**

Col nuovo dì - poi che nessun sospetta -  
Tutti cadranno, e sol per noi, quei vili  
Frateschi. Il loco solitario e l'ora  
Ben propizi ne son! Savonarola,  
E Valori, e Salviati, in pio corteggio  
Per la prova del foco, un'altra prova  
Daran ne' nostri ferri - io te l'accerto –  
Se 'l dimonio n'aita! ...

**Bettino:**

... A me sia dato  
Immergere l'acciar nell'abborrito  
Seno del frate e di Valori! ...

**Dolfo:**

E sia! ...  
A me sol basta di troncar lo stame  
D'inutil vita al folle giovanetto  
Che d'offendermi osò ... Roberto!<sup>34</sup>

Maria is torn. Can she reveal the murderous plan but betray her brother? Her language is emotive and her sense of hopelessness is palpable as she grapples with the situation:

E spegner vonno la gentil sua vita? ...  
Spegner! ... Non fia: lo salver! ... Ma figlia,  
Figlia non fosti? ... Ed il fratel tradire,  
Empia, potrai? ... Al morir suo non reggo!  
Corrasi! ... E dove? Un denso velo ingombra  
L'ansioso sguardo! ... Dove volger tento  
L'incauto piede? ... Ma salvarlo è forza!<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

Maria's story is one of conscience, faith and love versus familial loyalty. When her betrayal is uncovered, Dolfo is enraged, wanting to kill her, but Bettino defends her, saying he cannot murder his own flesh and blood:

**Dolfo:**

Tu forse non l'intendi?  
Di Domenico parla, di Valori,  
Del frate vil! ... Qual dubbio? O ci tradiva,  
O s'appresta a tradirne; e da noi tolto  
Un ostacolo sia, oppur vendetta  
Pigliam di lei.

**Bettino:**

Ed il pensate?  
Uccider posso una sorella? ... La mia vendetta  
È l'amor di Maria! ...  
Io la difendo!<sup>36</sup>

The exchange is passionate and dramatic and the reader rejoices at Bettino's love for his sister and at his decision to save her and defy Dolfo at his own peril. Although Bettino does not agree with what she has done, indeed, he is appalled and horrified by her betrayal, he cannot abandon her and shouting, "indietro, indietro", he protects her from Dolfo. Once again, Mormone is pitting good versus evil and showing us that individuals are capable of making the right moral choices. Nonetheless, the underlying message that this behaviour, however honourable it may be, is not always enough to achieve victory and the fulfilment of one's goals, is always present. It is Dolfo and his allies, with their cunning and violent ways, who ultimately triumph and Mormone uses his work to demonstrate the methods employed to quash the Savonarolan dream.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Although the minor conflicts and dramas add a more popular dimension to the work, it is the fourth and fifth scene of the first act which define the play and allow us truly to understand Mormone's reasons for not only originally penning the work in 1862 but agreeing to have it republished in 1877. In these scenes, the unfulfilled dreams of the Risorgimento, of a united, strong and respected Italy, are mentioned once again. Savonarola believes that Italy will eventually triumph over its enemies. At that time, "quando Italia il capo/ leverà dal sepolcro," a new age of peace, prosperity and love would begin for the whole world.<sup>37</sup> Such a triumph, he argues, cannot be obtained through force or deceit, as Machiavelli suggests. It is clear that Savonarola's envisaged victory as being both spiritual and worldly, as he states:

Italia,  
Poi che nel duolo le passate colpe  
Scontò de' figli, spenderà qual sole  
In sua purezza; ...<sup>38</sup>

Her achievement cannot, therefore, be tainted by crime. Machiavelli attempts to convince him that his dream will not be realised unless he resorts to force and to the wily methods of his adversaries. He begs Savonarola to reconsider his stance. He has the means to make his dreams come true:

Ed un tuo cenno allora  
Risuscitar de' popoli sovrana  
Roma potrebbe, e con l'idea Latina  
Sperder la notte boreal. La schiava  
In serto altero muterà suoi ceppi ...<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26. As far as I am aware, this is the first appreciation of the millenarian side of Savonarola's message. To my knowledge, it was not picked up by anyone before Mormone. The concept, of course, was fully explored and presented by Weinstein in his seminal work *Savonarola and Florence, Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, (Princeton, 1970), pp. 159-184.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

He challenges Savonarola, saying that he holds enormous sway over the people but will be unable to maintain his influence because he does not heed the rumblings of discontent. Savonarola has the power to change the actions and thoughts of the people but, in the end, he squanders the opportunity and does not have the means to maintain control:

Non sei tu forse che le vie del core  
Tutte sapevi, e a voglia tua le sorti  
Del popolo piegavi arbitro solo?  
In te l'ardir vien manco, o che disfarti  
Degli invidi non sai? ... Se tanto fosse,  
O sei di te minore, o quel fanciullo  
Ch'ebbe una gemma, e affascinò gli sguardi;  
Gettolla in Arno folleggiando ...<sup>40</sup>

Savonarola's angry and powerful reply encapsulates the primary theme of the play as he fiercely declares that he is a warrior of Christ and that the only methods and weapons he needs are those provided by God. His weapons are purely divine and he is armed with faith and virtue, choosing to offer his left cheek if he is struck on the right:

... Ma guerrier son io  
Come Gesù: nel ciel temprate sono  
L'armi che adopro. La virtude al vizio,  
E all'alterezza oppongo l'umiltade  
Del mio Maestro ... e se percoter vonno  
La destra guancia, offro la manca.<sup>41</sup>

Another thought provoking aspect of the exchange between the two men is the emphasis on *fortuna* versus *virtù*. Machiavelli tells Savonarola that although men are often slaves to the fickle nature of fortune - "fortuna/ in cima siede delle cose, e schiavi/ le son popoli e regi."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

- it need not always be their master - “ma lo scettro/ non tien di noi pur sempre!”<sup>43</sup> If one thinks that fortune is against them, then it is time to use all available weapons to try and turn fortune around. In this sense, *virtù* refers to one’s ability to use intellect, knowledge, cunning and any other qualities which may be useful to obtain the desired end. Savonarola, however, is unmoved, and Mormone succeeds in conveying Machiavelli’s sense of frustration at the Friar’s intransigence. Although the reader is aware what fate awaits Savonarola, Mormone is still able to create an atmosphere of expectation and finally despair as we realise that all hope is gone and that Savonarola’s struggle will soon be lost.

As already mentioned, Mormone’s decision to republish his work in 1877 is understandable when one considers the political situation in Italy at the time. He wrote the play immediately after unification. There was much to rejoice for but there was still a great deal to achieve. He, like many of his fellow patriots, wanted a free, lay Italy to realise fully her great potential and felt that, for this goal to be achieved, the new nation needed to flex its muscle and achieve military victory in Italy and abroad. The 1866 war with Austria had been disastrous and the conquest of Rome inglorious. Italy in 1877 was now looking to Africa to fulfil her expansionist and military dreams. Through his play, Mormone urged Italians to realise that, in order for Italy to be a great and powerful nation, she had to resort to force. Only then could she fulfil the aims of the Risorgimento and earn the respect of the world. Tellingly, the final lines of the play belong to Machiavelli, reinforcing Mormone’s message as he says:

Ed ecco spento

*Il suo lume divin con maggior foco!*<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Mormone's *Savonarola* is an important and interesting commentary on the political situation in Italy in the years immediately after unification. Mormone's work does not concern itself with the innumerable social issues facing Italy during the post-unification period. It does not allude, in any way, to the great need for improvements in social welfare, education and health nor to the inadequate living conditions of the vast majority of the population, nor does it address the question of personal responsibility and Catholic virtues. It is a great irony that Savonarola, one of the most important social, religious and political reformers in Italian history, is used by this playwright to further a national programme which does not involve the betterment of the welfare of the population. He positions Savonarola as the great reformer and man of God who, ultimately, was unable to defeat a more powerful enemy because of his inability to employ the necessary weapons. He could not control a people over whom he held enormous influence and, in the end, the people turned on him. In Mormone, we have a writer who, in Liberal Italy, addresses the unresolved issues of the Risorgimento. The reissue of the play in 1877 reveals the frustration of the author –and of many other Italians – with Italy's failure to win the glory and prestige many of its citizens craved.

### III

Not all the works written during Liberal Italy and having Savonarola as the main character were unconcerned with social reform. Towards the later part of the nineteenth century, other areas of disaffection within the newly created Italy were becoming more apparent. Many voices were raised criticising the new nation for having totally neglected the welfare of the people. In the case of the second work to be discussed, Francesco Carloni's *Savonarola*,

*Dramma Tragico*,<sup>45</sup> we do not have a writer who concentrates on establishing Italy's position, in terms of power and prestige, on the world stage. In fact, this play, published in 1885, is a rejection of those notions and is the first example of Italian literature which uses Savonarola to highlight the Italian government's refusal to address the mounting social problems besetting the newly formed nation. By the time of its publication, Italy had signed the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary<sup>46</sup> and, most importantly, Italian colonialism had begun with the occupation of the coast along the Red Sea to Massawa.<sup>47</sup> Although later to be proved disastrous, at this time, hopes were still high that the move into Africa would ensure wealth and glory for Italy. Whilst Mormone's work is an expression of belligerence which led to colonialism, Carloni's play is an indictment on what he sees as the culture of greed and selfishness which is eating at the core of the young state. His play, in direct contrast to Mormone's, chastises the ruling élite for its abrogation of responsibility in the areas of social welfare and living standards in favour of an agenda of military expansion. In this sense, Carloni's *Savonarola, Dramma Tragico* is a transitional work, bridging the gap between Mormone's defence of the expansionist policies of the Risorgimento, and the apologetic, reformist works calling for social and moral rejuvenation in Italy which appeared towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

Carloni's play is a very interesting example of the changing social and political attitudes becoming prevalent throughout Italy in the latter part of the nineteenth century. As discussed, post-unification disillusionment was high and there was a growing sense that Italy's problems, many and diverse, would not be solved by a ruling body predominantly concerned with Italian colonialism. Unfortunately, very little is known about the author since

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<sup>45</sup> Francesco Fortunato Carloni, *Savonarola, Dramma Tragico*, (Florence, 1885).

<sup>46</sup> See Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, 109-114; Geoffrey A. Haywood, *Failure of a Dream*, pp. 131-134.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871-1992*, p. 99.

there is no foreword to the play, nor have I been able to find, despite a long search, any information on him, or any other works he may have penned. We can, however, be reasonably sure the play was never staged since there is no mention of the work in any of the literary or theatrical encyclopaedias. Moreover, like Mormone's, the play does not lend itself to dramatic representation due to its reliance on heavily poetic language and the use of long and often cumbersome monologues. Taking into account Carloni's infrequent stage directions, it would appear that the author himself had little intention from the outset of ever seeing his work performed. Carloni also quotes Dante throughout his play, often using the great poet's words to highlight what he sees as Florence's and, by extension, Italy's woes.<sup>48</sup> But the quotes do not seem to sit well with the rest of the work, giving the impression of a young author, eager to appear well read. Although never staged, the fact that the play was published during a time of questioning and repositioning in Italy, coupled with Carloni's use of a controversial and well known historical figure as protagonist, would have helped to ensure the work was circulated amongst an educated, politically-aware readership.

Carloni's five-act play, not surprisingly, uses hendecasyllabic verse which is so often used in Italian theatre. Unlike Mormone's work, however, Carloni's, with its dramatic, poetic language, its adherence to a single plot and its minimal number of characters, is a good example of a nineteenth-century Alfierian style drama. In addition, the central character's struggle against a mightier, evil enemy is the only real story line in the play and any minor plots offered to us all seem to complement the main action. For example, the play opens with the impossible love story between Lucilia Valori, sister of the famed *piagnone* Francesco Valori, and Attilio Pucci, fierce opponent of the Friar.<sup>49</sup> Although it is possible that Carloni included the love story to give his work more popular appeal, it does not really develop to

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<sup>48</sup> See Francesco Fortunato Carloni, *Savonarola, Dramma Tragico*, p. 55.

<sup>49</sup> In his *appunti storici*, Carloni tells us that Attilio is actually the *arrabbiato* Francesco Pucci, but, to avoid confusion with Francesco Valori, Carloni changed his name to Attilio.

any extent and serves mainly to highlight the irreconcilable differences between Savonarola's supporters and his enemies.

As is also typical of Alfierian tragedy, there are very clear demarcations between the characters with the reader in no doubt as to where each person stands in relation to the others. In this work, the five characters (Savonarola is the sixth) are either passionate supporters of Savonarola or sworn enemies of his, working to bring about his downfall. The devoted *piagnoni*, Francesco Valori and Niccolò de' Lapi, are well known historical figures who represent the Savonarolan ideals of freedom, virtue and determination. In direct contrast are Attilio Pucci, fervent *arrabbiato*, and the Archbishop Romolino who is used by Carloni to embody the evils of the Papacy and the corruption of a Church which is working to bring about Savonarola's downfall. There are no grey areas with the characters since they are either on Savonarola's side, or against him. This approach renders the play a little didactic and lacking in depth. Nonetheless, Carloni is still able to deliver his messages, which will be more fully explored below, clearly and concisely.

Although nothing has been found on either the play or the author, fortunately Carloni does give us, at the end of the play, an appendix of "appunti storici sui personaggi e dichiarazioni dell'autore" which offer some insight into this little known playwright. He presents himself as a supporter of Savonarola and of the Savonarolan notion that liberty and religion can exist harmoniously. He says of the Friar:

Ammirabile per coraggio, combatté Alessandro VI papa e i Medici, restò sempre fermo nel generoso proponimento di stringere in efficace connubio la libertà e la religione, purgandole degli errori e degli eccessi ch'eransi ad esse accoppiati.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Carloni decries the corruption and the excesses which he feels have beset Italy, her ruling body and the Church and herein lies one of the main themes of the work. It is this corruption and the pursuit of self interests to the detriment of the greater good which have compromised a people's freedom and have led to the social and moral degradation in society. Although Carloni is referring to Savonarola and to fifteenth century Florence, he is speaking directly to his nineteenth-century audience, asking it to re assess its own actions and the current situation in Italy in the hope of arresting the rapid movement towards social decay.

He also gives us a more direct insight into his political and social stance and his assessment of modern day Italy. Indeed, his own words encapsulate the greater theme of his play; that is, the celebration of liberty and of patriotism in their pure and untainted form. In addressing why he chose to pen a work about Savonarola, he writes that he did so in order to:

Far vedere come dalle repubbliche si volga all'assolutismo e alla tirannide quando manchi la virtù del sacrificio e quando l'ambizione e la libidine dell'imperio s'intromette fra i cittadini e la cosa pubblica; raccomandare (seppur ve ne fosse d'uopo) alla memoria di tutti gl'Italiani un martire della libertà sacrificato appunto da' despoti e dagli ambiziosi quando si vider liberi dal freno di un popolo virilmente educato alle franchigie del pubblico reggimento; mettere in amore la libertà per sé stessa, non per le vane o sterili forme sotto cui possa venir ministrata.<sup>51</sup>

Carloni is making a statement on the education of a nation. In words which recall Massimo D'Azeglio's appeal for the need to 'make Italians', Carloni is speaking of the need to educate the Italian people in order that they may become more patriotically inclined. These words encapsulate the essence of Carloni's *Savonarola, Dramma Tragico*, which has, at its core, the message that Italians must love liberty for its own sake, not for what they feel can be gained from any political action. Carloni is instructing Italians how to love their country out of a

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

sense of patriotism alone, not because there may be personal benefit to be gained from such support. He wants Italians to serve their State, not seek to exploit it.

Carloni's work is all about liberty. However, it not only concerns itself with liberty from foreign and tyrannical rule, but more importantly, liberty from greed and selfishness. There are 26 references to *libertà* throughout the work and each character, in some way, represents some form of freedom or lack of it. Throughout the play, Carloni strives to instruct Italians that although liberty may, in fact, mean less comfort, less wealth and perhaps less prestige for them personally, they must be prepared to embrace it, since not to do so will plunge Italy into despotism. Liberty, in this sense, also means sacrifice. To neglect liberty, will cause the *patria* to fall under tyrannical rule: "I Medici von farsi / Di Fiorenza tiranni."<sup>52</sup> In this way, there is a great deal of polemic in the work against *lusso*. To worship worldly goods to the detriment of the common good and to reject civic duty in one's quest for personal, material improvement, is to risk losing the freedom which Italians had fought so hard to attain. Carloni argues that tyrannical rule may offer greater riches and prestige for some, but it will ultimately enslave a people and rob it of its freedom. This invective against the trappings of *lusso* are given strong voice by Valori, the great warrior, willing to sacrifice all for his beliefs and who, ultimately, loses his life in the struggle. In many ways, he is the spokesperson for the Savonarolan ideals of virtue, selflessness and determination and Carloni uses him to good effect to highlight what may need to be lost in order to achieve one's goals.

E queste

Vi basteranno, a voi? Medici ai Grandi

Offre ricchezze e gradi. Ove trovarne

Che a un popol bastin numeroso? E s'anche

Ve n'empisse a ribocco, avvi mai prezzo

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Che libertà compensi?<sup>53</sup>

Carloni's Niccolò de' Lapi is an interesting choice of character if one considers that Francesco has already been given the role, alongside Savonarola, of moral spokesperson. Carloni would have chosen to include him because he realised that many Italians would relate to the famous Florentine. Carloni, like much of his readership, would have been familiar with D'Azeglio's well known nationalist work, *Niccolò de' Lapi, i palleschi e i piagnoni*,<sup>54</sup> and he would have recognised Niccolò's value as a character who demands respect, embodying strength, credibility, devotion and a willingness to sacrifice all for a cause. In the play, his cry of "in libertà si viva / O si muoia pugnando,"<sup>55</sup> underscores his commitment to fight to the end for his beliefs. Indeed, anyone familiar with Niccolò's own history would know that his own, life-long struggle for Florentine liberty came at an enormous personal cost. During the siege of 1529-1530, as we have seen, Niccolò not only saw his beloved city reconquered by the Medici, but also lost four sons in battle, and his fortune. His is a story of ultimate self sacrifice: the great leader of the resistance movement who, despite losing so much, never stopped believing in the cause and never wavered in his devotion to Savonarola. Through Niccolò, Carloni pleads with the readers to reassess their own situations and not be beguiled by promises of personal gain. He fears that many of his fellow citizens have chosen to serve the tyrant, greed and *lusso*, rather than serve the State and help it to become truly free. Carloni is calling for a moral and civic rebirth, as well as political renewal and Niccolò is a wonderful vehicle through which to illustrate this point. His ardent devotion to Savonarola exemplifies his sense of commitment and his courage. He is an excellent example of civic virtue and responsibility to present to the Italian people. With his rousing speeches, he stirs his fellow Florentines to action and his calls to "Alzar qui den la voce / Quanti han virtù e

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> See chapter 1 for a discussion of this work.

<sup>55</sup> Francesco Fortunato Carloni, *Savonarola, Dramma Tragico*, p. 42.

coraggio”<sup>56</sup> are aimed directly at late nineteenth-century Italians. Savonarola stood firm against the established order, never compromising his beliefs and lost his life doing so. He constantly urged the people of Florence to look beyond what the Medici tyrants or, indeed, the Church may be offering them and commit themselves to an agenda of social and civic rejuvenation. He championed a sense of responsibility to one’s fellow man and to one’s *patria*, not because of what may be gained but because it was the morally correct thing to do, and the only way to achieve true liberty. Niccolò, embodying the Savonarolan spirit, courageously fought for his city’s freedom, paying an enormous personal price along the way. Carloni is asking Italians to learn from his example and stand up for what they believe despite the personal cost.

Carloni’s play is an appeal to Italians to take action against the worsening social situation in Italy. He attributes this growing social decay to the ruling élite’s determination to use the State as a weapon for expansion, rather than serving the State in order to improve the welfare of its citizens. Carloni’s use of Attilio Pucci in his work is a clever way to deliver his message of political reform through a character who represents all that the playwright is arguing against. Attilio, committed *arrabbiato*, is afraid to embrace Savonarola and all that he stands for and fearful of what the Friar’s call for moral and civic reform would mean for him. Attilio believes that the State is merely a vehicle through which personal ambitions can be achieved. It is a means to be used to attain prestige and wealth. He attacks Florence’s weak and undisciplined military and its divided people, arguing that she can never be truly great without military achievement:

È franco.  
Firenza è in due da gran tempo divisa;  
Ognun lo vede: e scorge ognun qual danno

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Ne derivi allo Stato. Incerta e molle  
La disciplina militar; de' ricchi  
Fazioso il governo; alte, insoffribili  
Le gravezze ...  
Ecco lo stato di Fiorenza! E fuori  
Che si pensa di noi? Dicono - esausto  
È il pubblico tesoro, anima e vita  
Della vera potenza; il popolo scisso...<sup>57</sup>

Attilio goes on to argue that the only way for a state to achieve greatness is through expansion and military conquest. He eschews any sort of civic responsibility, looking instead, to what he may be able to gain from any action the State undertakes. He is concerned with reputation and prestige, not with the welfare of his fellow citizens. Through him, Carloni is highlighting the trap that Italians must strive to avoid. Liberty often comes at a very high personal price but the cost of its alternative - tyranny and enslavement - must be seen as being far too high.

In addition to representing the decline in moral and civic values evident in Italy, Attilio is also at the centre of the only sub-plot in the play. The story of Lucilia and Attilio, although not explored in any depth, does add a degree of intrigue to the work. However, its main purpose is to expose the irreconcilable nature of what Savonarola embodies and what his enemies represent. Indeed, Carloni himself, in his *appunti storici*, says of Lucilia: “sta a dimostrare l’impotenza degli affetti più teneri di fronte alle passioni politiche.”<sup>58</sup> Their love is no match for their political and ideological differences and is doomed from the outset. Attilio cannot see beyond his own aspirations and selfish desires, not even to please the woman he loves. Wealth and glory are more important to him, and Savonarola and his

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

followers, including Lucilia, pose a severe obstacle which must be removed. Lucilia, for her part, is another example of virtue and courage. Although she is presented as one dimensional, she does manage to elicit the reader's sympathy, further highlighting the notion of sacrifice for liberty's sake which permeates the work. She loses her brother, Francesco, in the struggle and she knows that by standing firm in her own beliefs she will also lose the man she loves. It is Niccolò who expresses the sympathy for the "giovinetta infelice!" that the reader is feeling, bluntly stating that "In un momento / Hai perduto l'amante ed il fratello!"<sup>59</sup>

Carloni's play is not only a petition for liberty, civic virtue and responsibility, but also a call for freedom from corruption and greed. Savonarola, with his tireless campaign against the corruption of the Church and his sustained criticism of Alexander VI provides weapons for Carloni's attack against the Church, thus enabling him to give expression to his anticlericalism. In the play, the Church is presented through Romolino, and he is used to excellent effect to highlight the fact that religion and the papacy are distinct. The play, to a certain extent, is also a polemic against the Church and the politicisation and greed which have beset it. In 1885, when the play was published, the Church was very much a subversive organisation in Italian society. It was totally against the new Liberal State and had cut all relations with it. The vexatious Roman Question was nowhere near resolution and although the Church in Italy was beginning to organise itself into a more cohesive body,<sup>60</sup> any messages of social renewal it delivered were being overshadowed by the open hostility between Church and State. Although Pope Leo XIII pursued an agenda of modern social teachings,<sup>61</sup> these had not fully taken shape in 1885 and his famous encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* was still six years away. Carloni, in criticising Alexander VI and all that he

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>60</sup> The first Vatican Council had been held from December 1869 to July 1870. It was the first time in centuries that bishops from different Italian regions and, indeed, from all over the world, had come together to discuss the issues facing the Church.

<sup>61</sup> See Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871-1992*, pp. 83-85.

represented, was sending a subtle warning to all Italians that the Church should never abandon, as it did in Savonarola's day, the guiding role in society. Rome turned her back on Savonarola, embracing an agenda of deceit and corruption and, in the end, liberty was lost.

When Romolino says of Savonarola:

Io di malcauto

L'accusa abborro, e sai che al Vaticano

Soverchio zel più del delitto è grave.<sup>62</sup>

he expresses how the Church has succumbed to greed and self interest, seeing Savonarola's crime to be not so much what he has done, but the zeal and the passion with which he has done it. He has embarrassed the Pontiff and this is, by far, the greater evil. This is a Church, according to Carloni, that abhors truth, and Romolino represents all that is wrong with it. He knows he is doing wrong, that his actions are not in the best interests of Florence, yet he goes ahead because not to do so would be to incur the wrath of Alexander VI. He puts his own personal comfort and status above what he knows is right and moral. In stark contrast to the virtuous characters in the play, Romolino totally abandons any sense of moral responsibility towards Savonarola and to the people of Florence, leaving them both to their fates.

Befittingly, Carloni allows his protagonist, Savonarola, in the penultimate scene of the play, to bring together the messages of moral, political and civic renewal. Addressing for the final time the Florentine people, just as he is about to be led to his execution, Savonarola delivers a powerful, emotionally charged plea to the people to regain their spirit and accept their responsibilities in relation to their nation and to each other. He laments the loss of liberty - "ormai perduta è al tutto / La sacra e dolce libertà"<sup>63</sup> - warning that Florence, now enslaved, will fall victim to tyranny:

... di schiavi

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<sup>62</sup> Francesco Fortunato Carloni, *Savonarola, Dramma Tragico*, p. 31.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Pentiti forse, un popolo fra poco  
Vedrà l'onda dell'Arno e di tiranni  
Un drappello crudel ...  
Di veleni e sicari e di quant'altro  
Il dispotismo circondar si gode  
A saziare la libidin rea  
Dell'usurpata potestà.<sup>64</sup>

As he berates the people, accusingly declaring “l'anima adesso / Vendi ai tiranni”,<sup>65</sup> we hear Carloni speaking to his readers, pleading with them to rethink their own actions or risk the nation spiralling into despotism. Savonarola rhetorically asks the people if it is possible, after having been “inermi”, to reacquire civic virtue - “la cara pace dell'alma e la civil franchezza?”<sup>66</sup> His message and that of Carloni's, is, however, one of hope. Having posed the question, he goes on to say that if fortune were with the people, giving them a leader (in this case, a King) driven by a selfless desire to improve Italy, and raise her to glorious heights, then, and only then, should the people place their faith and trust in that “Re leale.”

E le lagrime vostre a pietà movano  
Serto regal cui preme alto desio  
Di gridar, SORGI, a questa Italia, SORGI  
O DONNA ELLE [sic] GENTI, un RE leale  
Più pensoso d'altrui che di sé stesso;  
Che agnello in pace e sia leone in guerra,  
Allor ... ma allora sol tutto si metta  
Il vostro amor, la vostra fede in lui; ...<sup>67</sup>

Carloni is arguing that it is not at all assured that Italians will acquire a sense of civic duty. Although the passage may seem a veiled attack on the monarchy, it is not. There is no direct

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

reference to Umberto I, but Carloni can be seen to support him, presenting a monarch who has the interests of his people, more than his own, at heart. It is the Italian people whom the author is attacking. It is their ability to reform which is in doubt as he questions whether they will ever be worthy of a strong, selfless leader. Only when Italians accept their personal responsibility would Italy be able to achieve true glory. But Italians can expect to be led by a strong “leale” monarch only when they have attained the necessary *virtù*. In Carloni’s view, they are a long way from doing that. The King may be able to rule justly and fearlessly but the people are not yet worthy of him.

Carloni’s play is concerned with ‘making’ Italians and, more specifically, making them worthy of the new nation which so many fought bravely to attain. It appeals to the people to be prepared to forego their own comforts, wealth, self interest and prestige for their *patria*. The author, through the Savonarolan experience, presents the consequences of greed and corruption and draws a stark distinction between good government exercised by the people and despotic rule. Savonarola stands for liberty and for civic virtue. The enemies of this government are the Church and selfless citizens beset with greed and corruption which, if unchecked, will lead Italy into tyranny and decline.

Although this play does not tackle the issue of Italian colonisation directly, it indirectly rails against the notion of military expansion being sought for the sake of prestige and wealth. In this way, Carloni is arguing that the government should not be concerned with military glory but rather with the civic rearmament of the nation. In calling for a greater moral commitment from Italians and for greater political involvement, Carloni shows himself to belong to the small, radical groups of people who were against the political system as then constituted. These groups wanted to introduce a more democratic sense of *libertà* into Italy, and their calls for equality and for the rejection of authoritarian leadership were beginning to gain

momentum. Carloni's play, with its emphasis on moral rejuvenation and civic virtue is an excellent introduction into the final works to be discussed in this chapter. The political climate in Italy was changing rapidly towards the end of the nineteenth century and Savonarola's role was, once again, modified to serve the nation's latest needs.

#### IV

Among the most vocal critics of the Liberal State and its ruling body, there were many scholars and admirers of Savonarola. To spur the people to action and thus improve the lot of millions of Italians, these scholars, led by Pasquale Villari, the great Savonarola scholar, presented a new social image of Savonarola in which emphasis was placed on his efforts for the welfare of the people. Their message was then disseminated in society and in the Church and, as we shall see, was later taken up by apologists and playwrights. Even though my discussion concentrates on Savonarola's treatment by fictional authors, there is a need to look briefly at these non-fictional writers as their work influenced the playwrights and poets who will be examined later.

Villari, as well as other admirers of Savonarola such as Cesare Guasti and the Dominican Fra Vincenzo Marchese, were convinced that a unified Italy, with its many and almost intractable social problems needed new figureheads and new idealistic leaders to help it overcome them. These *fin de siècle* commentators saw Italy as being in need of social reform since the government had neglected the welfare of the people in its quest for military might and prestige through the rapid industrialisation this entailed. They, together with many Italians, were disillusioned with the new state and with its lack of interest in unifying the people and creating a sense of nationhood. The rash foreign policy and the military debacles in the war

against Austria and in Africa had highlighted the State's mediocrity as well as the vast domestic shortcomings of the nation. The much heralded prosperity for all had not been achieved.<sup>68</sup> Into this climate these Savonarolan admirers introduced a new Savonarola. They wanted the government to concentrate on the welfare of Italians, but they also wanted individual Italians to become more patriotic and more altruistic; to contribute thereby to the much delayed regeneration of the population. They sought to achieve this through moral instruction and through a different treatment of the Friar. Their effort can also be seen as an early manifestation of the revival of Catholicism as a political force. They were aided by the celebrations in 1898 of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Savonarola's death<sup>69</sup> which brought to public attention the figure of the Friar, presented now not merely as a religious figure, but also as a foresighted social reformer.

Savonarola's human side and his ideas on social reform were now given prominence in the hope of bringing about an awakening of social responsibility in the government and in the Italian people. His teachings on issues such as poverty and exploitation were highlighted and then applied to the problems facing Italy at the time. Much emphasis was placed on Savonarola's programme for social renewal, on his campaign to restore a moral code, so as to bring about a new, Catholic order, which many regarded as the means to invigorate a society in decline.<sup>70</sup> In her article, "Profeta di Cristo Re: una lettura di Savonarola nella cultura cattolica," Menozzi argues that the Catholics' employment of the figure of Savonarola was a precursor to Leo XIII's agenda for social reform<sup>71</sup> and that "l'esperimento Savonaroliano preannunciava l'invito rivolto dal pontefice ai fedeli di intervenire nella società per rendere le

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<sup>68</sup> Nicholas Doumanis, *Italy. Inventing the Nation*, (London, 2001), p. 108.

<sup>69</sup> See Emmanuale Magri (ed.), *Quarto centenario della morte di Fra Girolamo Savonarola*, (Florence, 1898), for an account of events surrounding the 1898 celebrations and for a detailed look at reactions from the Italian press to this new found interest in Savonarola.

<sup>70</sup> D. Menozzi, 'Profeta di Cristo Re: una lettura di Savonarola nella cultura cattolica tra Otto e Novecento', in *Cristianesimo nella storia*, Vol. XX/3, (Bologna, 1999), p. 653.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 650.

istituzioni politiche moderne conformi alla dottrina cattolica...”<sup>72</sup> Savonarola had called upon Florentines to accept Christ as their only true ruler and to return to the spiritual Church, renouncing materialism and earthly pursuits, dedicating themselves to God and to the betterment of the welfare of their countrymen. Similarly, post-unification Catholics wanted the government to acknowledge the decline in the welfare of many groups of Italians and to take steps to ameliorate their living conditions. They fought for an establishment of a higher moral order and they used Savonarola and his teachings to awaken society’s conscience and to convince it to initiate much needed welfare reforms.<sup>73</sup>

The celebrations of 1898 brought Savonarola to the attention of the masses as Catholic newspapers throughout the country dedicated pages and even entire issues to the memory of the Friar.<sup>74</sup> Articles in the press took various forms. There were numerous devotional accounts of the Friar’s life which highlighted his commitment to the fight against Church corruption, against tyranny and against the moral degradation of society. In addition, many well known social commentators, Church leaders<sup>75</sup> and historians wrote articles on various aspects of Savonarola’s apostolate, all of which served to increase public awareness of him and make him a figure of great social relevance. Notably, as already mentioned, the Dominican Vincenzo Marchese as well as the historians Pasquale Villari<sup>76</sup> and Cesare

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 651.

<sup>73</sup> Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 and 1899 encyclicals, *Rerum novarum* and *Annum Sacrum*, and Pope Pius X’s 1903 encyclical, *E supremi apostolatus*, can be seen as being directly influenced by Savonarola’s teachings. Menozzi tells us that Ferretti, in his work, *Il trionfo della croce secondo il concetto di fra’ Girolamo Savonarola*, (Florence, 1913), argues that “l’insegnamento politico del Savonarola costituiva un’anticipazione del programma lanciato dal Pio X, nella sua prima enciclica: *E supremi apostolatus*. Ferretti goes on to argue that these encyclicals had effectively issued Catholics with the directive to: “restituire nuovamente ai poteri regali di Cristo e della chiesa quella società che la modernità aveva allontanato dalla verità cattolica.” *Ibid.*, pp. 657-658.

<sup>74</sup> Emmanuele Magri (ed.), *Quarto centenario della morte di Fra Girolamo Savonarola*, p. 14. In addition, newspapers such as: *Lo Stendardo*, Cuneo; *Il Mugello Cattolico*; *L’Osservatore Cattolico*, Milan; *Voce della Verità*, Rome; *La Democrazia Cristiana*, Turin; *L’Avvenire*, Bologna; *L’Amico*, Trieste; *La Stella Cattolica*, Florence; *La Sicilia Cattolica*, and *La Croce*, Naples, all dedicated substantial space to Savonarola during 1898.

<sup>75</sup> For example, letters were published by Card. Agostino Bausa, Archbishop of Florence; Mons. Giacinto Rosso, Bishop of Luni and Sarzana, and the Archbishop of Perugia. *Ibid.* pp. 48, 49, 65.

<sup>76</sup> For an interesting discussion on Marchese’s and Villari’s work on Savonarola, see R. Spennati, “La riscoperta di Girolamo Savonarola nella seconda metà dell’ottocento. L’opera del domenicano Vincenzo Marchese e dello storico Pasquale Villari”, in *Rivista di ascetica e mistica*, 2002, n. 4, October-December, pp. 411-447.

Guasti<sup>77</sup> played significant roles in reawakening interest in the ‘social’ Savonarola. Indeed, as the historian Spennati remarks, Marchese dedicated himself to ensuring that Savonarola’s spiritual legacy was not forgotten:

Fin dalle prime pubblicazioni, infatti, il padre Marchese non si era lasciato sfuggire l’occasione per ricordare quello che era stato il più significativo contributo del frate, cioè di trasmettere e rinsaldare la fede nei suoi concittadini al fine di ottenere un più profondo e radicale rinnovamento dei costumi.<sup>78</sup>

There were also a number of publications on Savonarola which emerged just prior to 1898 and which dealt with the human side of the Friar, as well as the need to find the ‘real’ Savonarola, such as Paolo Luotto’s “Il vero Savonarola e il Savonarola di L. Pastor”, published in 1897.<sup>79</sup> Savonarola’s apostolate was thereby given a social dimension, as opposed to a purely political and moral one. In these works, Savonarola is presented as a man who tried to reform society in ways that helped the poor and brought greater equality to the people. As Villari stated in his paper published in 1898:

Il Savonarola credeva che la questione sociale, la quale più o meno è sempre esistita, si dovesse risolvere col rendere giustizia ai miseri, e promuovere in ogni modo l’affratellamento dei vari ordini sociali. L’amore, egli ripeteva sempre, ha una gran forza, è onnipotente.<sup>80</sup>

This repositioning of Savonarola took place in the middle of a period of great social distress in Italy. The Catholics, with their patriotic feelings but opposed to the policies of the Liberal

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<sup>77</sup> See F. De Feo, “Girolamo Savonarola nel pensiero del venerabile Cesare Guasti”, in *Savonarola. Quaderni del quinto centenario 1498-1998*, 1 (1997)/2, (Bologna, 1997), pp. 61-122.

<sup>78</sup> R. Spennati, “La riscoperta di Girolamo Savonarola nella seconda metà dell’ottocento”, p. 415.

<sup>79</sup> Paolo Luotto, *Il vero Savonarola e il Savonarola di L. Pastor*, (Florence 1897). Interestingly, Menozzi states: “era P. Luotto, nella monumentale opera redatta per confutare i giudizi negativi formulati dal Pastor sul Savonarola, a mettere in rilievo le connessioni tra il magistero del Pecci (Pope Leo XIII) e la dottrina politica del Domenicano. Ricordando, con puntuali rinvii alle encicliche *Immortale Dei* e *Rerum novarum*, come l’insegnamento del pontefice mirasse a ‘rendere cristiani gli stati, come già gl’individui e la famiglia’, sottolineava la piena conformità della proclamazione della regalità di Cristo su Firenze con questa prospettiva.” D. Menozzi, “Profeta di Cristo Re,” p. 649. See also Emmanuale Magri (ed.), *Quarto centenario della morte di Fra Girolamo Savonarola*, p.232, for a list of publications dealing with the historical Savonarola which appeared just before 1898.

<sup>80</sup> Pasquale Villari, “Girolamo Savonarola e l’ora presente,” in *Rivista d’Italia*, Vol. 7, (Rome, 1898), p. 15.

government, were looking for someone who could be used to guide the nation into the next century, who could help restore social stability and improve the welfare of the Italian people. Savonarola was their choice. From Savonarola they also obtained the teaching that a polity ruled justly and compassionately would be favoured by God and would thus be ensured a prosperous and successful future.<sup>81</sup> They sought to impart this teaching to a nation eager for unity and glory, but unable and unwilling to look after the welfare of the common people.

The new vision of Savonarola as a social reformer is given greater popular diffusion in a play and a poem written during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They are Giuseppe Manni, “Fra Girolamo Savonarola”,<sup>82</sup> and Silvio D’Amico and G. Alessandro Rosso, *Savonarola*.<sup>83</sup> A great deal of the importance of these fictional works lies in the timing of their appearance since they were written in a period of questioning and reassessment of social values. Liberal Italy had to be encouraged to undertake reforms and not to concentrate solely on political and military prestige. Politics was no longer the only theme in the new State. Social issues had been brought to centre stage by Catholics and Socialists in particular. It became increasingly apparent that the new Italy, if it were to prosper, had to deal with the problems facing it. At a time when social, political and civic reform were desperately needed and also violently requested by an enraged population, Savonarola was used to great effect. He was presented as the great reformer who became the voice of the disaffected and who spoke out defiantly against inequality, poverty and exploitation. He never wavered in his beliefs, constantly calling on the Florentines to realise their duty as Catholic individuals to, not only their *patria*, but to each other. It is this vision of the Friar which the final two authors to be discussed in this chapter focus on. The authors felt that Savonarola’s call for

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<sup>81</sup> For a detailed discussion, see the work by Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation*, (Oxford, 1994), particularly, chapter 1.

<sup>82</sup> Giuseppe Manni, “Fra Girolamo Savonarola”, in *Nuove Rime 1884 -1903*, pp. 205-211, (Florence, 1903).

<sup>83</sup> Silvio D’Amico & G. Alessandro Rosso, *Savonarola. Poema tragico in un prologo e quattro atti*, (Rome, 1913). This work will also be referred to by its short title: *Savonarola*.

personal reform could be used to stir the conscience of the ruling classes and of the Italian people.

Although there are only two fictional works to be examined, it must be remembered that these works were published after the very important writings by Villari and Marchese had appeared, in addition to apologetic works by authors such as Luotto. Great interest in the Friar had also been created by the activities surrounding the celebrations of the fourth centenary of his death. Savonarolan awareness was high and his memory was continuing to be manipulated to suit the agenda of the concerned social reformers of the time. Taking this into account, we can see that Manni's poem, short and not particularly well known, and the better known work by D'Amico and Rosso, became increasingly relevant and enhanced the literary arsenal of the Liberal reformers. Their works centred on the figure of Savonarola as an advocate of personal responsibility. The Friar's message focused on individual and civic virtue, based on steadfastness and on standing up for one's principles, regardless of the consequences. By using his example, Manni, D'Amico and Rosso called on Catholics to become more engaged with the new state. They tackle the issue of individual commitment to the State and stress the notion that Italian Catholics (who were now being called back to the State by Leo XIII) had to abide by certain principles such as proper behaviour, selflessness and, most importantly, freedom from greed and egoism. It is this different sense of *libertà*, stemming from an adherence to fundamental Catholic values, which underscores the following two works. In this light, it is clear that Savonarola, with his resolute devotion to both his faith and his adopted *patria*, was the perfect instrument through whom these could deliver their messages. In so doing, their campaigns contributed to the large shift in government social policies that occurred shortly after, under Giolitti, and consequently contributed also to the improvement of the welfare of the Italian people. Once again,

Savonarola's teachings and his actions had been used by Italian fictional writers to change political agendas, patterns of behaviour and thereby help shape modern Italy.

## V

The first work to be examined is "Fra Girolamo Savonarola", a short poem written by Giuseppe Manni. Published in 1903, it appears in a collection of works by Manni entitled *Nuove Rime 1884-1903*. Although Manni was a prolific writer, publishing numerous poetic works, short novels and biographical pieces,<sup>84</sup> he does not seem to have earned a noteworthy reputation as an Italian literary figure. He does not appear in the main Italian studies of the period nor in the theatrical and literary encyclopaedia. However, there is a minor piece, published not long after his death, which sheds some light on his life. Written in 1923, it is a eulogy and was printed in the Jesuit *Civiltà cattolica*.<sup>85</sup> Although brief, it does offer some interesting information on Manni's life and his literary works. The writer, (who is unknown) appears to over-emphasise Manni's skill as author, however, he does make the interesting point that Manni was friends with an array of influential and well known Italian writers such as Carducci, Villari and Mazzoni, perhaps signalling not only a love of literature and passion for learning but an amenable nature. Born in Florence, on 20 August 1844, and dying on 21 January 1923, Giuseppe Manni was, first and foremost, a man of God. He chose a life of devotion very early. He entered the *Ordine Calasanziano* in 1859 and he was ordained priest

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<sup>84</sup> Other publications by Giuseppe Manni: *Rime, 1870-1883*, Florence, 1884; *Cari morti, iscrizioni scelte*, Florence, 1909; *Suor Teresa (Dal volume storia di un'Anima)*, Florence, 1910; *Il canto XXXIII del Purgatorio*, Florence, 1910; *Italian spoken in twenty -two days*, Rome, 1911; *Novissima, 1905-1906*, Florence, 1917; *Poesie scelte*, Florence, 1924. N.B. Although *Italian spoken in twenty-two days*, is accredited to Manni, it does seem rather odd that he wrote this book since it is not in keeping with any of his other works and there is no mention of it in the literature on Manni I have been able to find.

<sup>85</sup> "Cose italiane: Morte del P. Giuseppe Manni", in *Civiltà cattolica*, 74: 1, Rome, 1923, pp. 271-272.

in 1868.<sup>86</sup> He had a lifelong interest in the teaching of Italian, having been the rector of the *Badia Fiesolana* for ten years and professor of Italian at the *liceo* of Florence for 20 years.

Manni's "Fra Girolamo Savonarola" is a little known poem which follows standard metre and rhyming patterns. Although unremarkable in either style or form, it is carefully constructed, with each quatrain (four verse stanza) written in the hendecasyllabic style and the final verse ending with the commonly used *rima tronca*. This practice of cutting short the final verse was employed by many Italian poets in order to give the final line of each stanza emphasis and add a sense of drama to the poem. Manni was obviously an admirer of the great Giuseppe Carducci, who wrote during the second half of the nineteenth century, and this poem is instantly identified as Carduccian in language and style. Indeed, the title of Manni's collection in which "Fra Girolamo Savonarola" appears - *Nuove Rime*, is very similar to, and was perhaps borrowed from, Carducci's well known *Rime Nuove*. The language is rhetorical, lyrical, powerful and hyperbolic in places and is in the tradition of high Italian poetry dating from the 1500s. This elevated, scholarly style of language, also very Carduccian, runs the entire way through Manni's poem. As we would expect, the rhyming style is also very standard, with the common AB ab form employed.

Although the stylistic and linguistic characteristics of Manni's poem help us to contextualise it, its importance, for the purposes of my research, lies purely in its subject. It is a commemorative work, written by a priest, which celebrates the virtues of Savonarola and bemoans the injustices suffered by him at the hands of a corrupt pope. Manni, a Catholic and a patriot, presents Savonarola as a figure to be admired and emulated. Savonarola believed that Catholic virtues could, and indeed should, exist harmoniously with love of one's *patria*. He fought to teach the Florentine people that, in order to best serve their city, they needed to

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

undergo a spiritual and personal renewal and put their own interests to one side in order to ensure a better society. This Savonarolan teaching of the interrelationship between patriotism and Catholicism, love of *patria* and civic responsibility, is also at the core of Manni's message. Indeed, the author tells us that, through his writing, he aims to bring together his two great loves: God and Italy, "sollecito d'insegnare la concordia tra due grandi amori: Dio e l'Italia."<sup>87</sup> In "Fra Girolamo Savonarola" Manni uses the Friar to show his readers that, if they are to serve their country effectively, they must follow Catholic doctrine and remain true to their beliefs, just as Savonarola had done centuries before.

Manni's admiration for the Friar is established from the outset - "indomito leon / questo superbo fior de'cavalieri."<sup>88</sup> Just as strong and clear-cut is his disdain for those who persecuted him:

Ivi non domo ancor sotto l'incarco  
delle ingiuste catene e de' martir  
il perseguito Frate di San Marco  
parla con Dio, come chi dee morir.<sup>89</sup>

The language is dramatic as he goes on to describe Savonarola's fortitude in confronting his fate, despite being physically exhausted:

... la forte anima sua, tentata invan,  
traverso il velo della carne stanca  
guarda sicura all'orrida diman.<sup>90</sup>

Manni's poem is an apologetic work which calls on Italians to embrace the teachings of the Church and not be beguiled by promises of wealth or personal gain. Despite condemning the forces of corruption which ultimately defeated Savonarola, the poem is not anticlerical.

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<sup>87</sup> "Cose italiane: Morte del P. Giuseppe Manni", in *Civiltà cattolica*, p. 272.

<sup>88</sup> Giuseppe Manni, "Fra Girolamo Savonarola", p. 206.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

Interestingly, although he takes his stylistic lead from Carducci, his work is inspired by his religious beliefs, as opposed to the anticlericalism often displayed by Carducci. Towards the end of the poem, Manni tells his readers that they must fight to rekindle the memory of the Friar, a memory which the papacy<sup>91</sup> has been long trying to erase. He is addressing his contemporaries, asking them to rekindle the emotion for Savonarola and learn from his great teaching:

Tranquillo altine dopo l'inquieta  
resurrezione, il buono animo uman  
guarda alla grande idea del suo profeta  
come alla stella nave in ocean.<sup>92</sup>

Manni's condemnation of a corrupt pope (Alexander VI) and those who served him forms part of the poem's greater theme: *libertà*. He uses Savonarola to highlight the need to be free from greed, from corruption and from spiritual bankruptcy. Only when this is achieved can Italy reach her full potential. He presents Savonarola as the great saviour to whom Italians must look and from whom they must learn if they are ever to be part of this new, reformed world. Manni's comparison of Savonarola with Columbus is clear: Columbus' discovery of the new world had marked the beginning of a new age, so reflection on the Friar's death at the stake will prove to be the inspiration for a new tomorrow:

Godi; Colombo ier di mari strani  
di strane terre dalla immensità,  
e tu dal rogo segnerai domani  
il cominciar della novella età.<sup>93</sup>

The poem is not a call for social reform, nor is it a polemic against the politics of the day. Even though Manni would have been aware of the social and political issues facing the nation

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<sup>91</sup> Manni refers to the papacy under Alexander VI as "il putrido sopor". *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

at the turn of the century, his work is an appeal for personal reform and a return to an adherence to basic Catholic values.

Savonarola is seen as the spiritual saviour of Florence, “il gran battezzator”<sup>94</sup> and, by extension, his example and his teachings are presented by Manni as essential for the nation’s future. Manni uses the recurrent motif of fire to symbolise destruction followed by spiritual revival. He opens three stanzas dramatically with “dimani il rogo,”<sup>95</sup> constantly bringing the reader back to the fact that Savonarola is awaiting execution, sent to his death by those who had abandoned the true ways of the Church. When Manni tells us of the “foco del martir”<sup>96</sup> he is, once again, emphasising Savonarola’s sacrifice and his fervour for all that he believed in. This strong, lyrical language is used throughout the poem and has the effect of adding a degree of expectation to the work. Manni draws the reader towards the inevitable conclusion, building the tension and cleverly juxtaposing Savonarola’s calmness and unwavering faith with the turmoil of the situation. Although the poem closes with the Friar about to be executed, the final tone is one of optimism as Manni tells his readers that, if the Savonarolan example is heeded, then there is hope for redemption since his example will live on:

A’ piedi tuoi nel tardo monumento  
sculti con mano dalla Carità,  
folgoreggian, segnacoli al redento  
mondo, due nomi: CRISTO e LIBERTÀ.<sup>97</sup>

These final verses answer the question as to why Manni chose Savonarola to deliver his message. He tells us that the Friar will rise from the ashes and his memory will inspire people to realise that religion and patriotism, spirituality and liberty can, and should, exist together. The very *dantesco* “Cristo e Libertà,” conveys the symbols of a redeemed, new

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206, 208, 209.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

world; a world which Manni puts forward as essential if Italians are truly to prosper. Italians must embrace this Christ-like notion of selflessness, *carità*, of giving all to one's fellow men, if they are to be part of a reinvigorated Italy. They must look to Savonarola for inspiration since he lived his life according to these principles. This final note of promise encapsulates Manni's whole poem. He champions him as a devoted man of God who steadfastly refused to compromise his beliefs, but also as a model of political and social behaviour for all Italians to follow.

Manni's poem raises the very interesting issue of personal and civic responsibilities. As we shall see, these issues were explored to greater extent and effect in the work by D'Amico and Rosso which will be examined next. *Savonarola, Poema tragico in un prologo e quattro atti*, by Silvio D'Amico and G. Alessandro Rosso was published in 1913. It is the only play dealing with Savonarola to appear during the Giolittian period. What also makes this work particularly interesting is the calibre of one of its authors. Although little is known about the Sicilian dramatist, Rosso, his co author, Silvio D'Amico (1887-1955) is a very well known figure on the Italian theatrical landscape. Born in Rome and having spent most of his life in the capital, he is considered by many to be one of Italy's greatest theatre critics and theorists. Educated by the Jesuits at the Istituto Massimo of Rome, he went on to graduate in jurisprudence, but in 1912, at the age of 25, decided to become a journalist and secured a position on the daily *L'idea nazionale*.<sup>98</sup> It appears he had an interest in the theatre from a young age, and his move to journalism offered him the means to indulge this passion. From 1925–1940, he was the theatre critic for *La Tribuna* which had merged with *L'Idea Nazionale*, and in 1934, he was nominated as Commissioner for the reform of the *Regia Scuola di Recitazione*, transforming it into the *Accademia Nazionale d'Arte Drammatica*,

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<sup>98</sup> D'Amico's biographical details can be found in: Sandro D'Amico (ed.), *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, vol. IV, (Rome, 1957), pp. 42-45.

which today bears his name. In addition to this role, he continued his work with various newspapers and was the editor of the *Rivista Italiana del Dramma* from 1937-1943. He also wrote for the well known *Giornale d'Italia* (1941-1943) and *Il Tempo* (1945-1955). A prolific writer, he contributed to various literary journals, most noteworthy *La Fiera Letteraria* (1925-1926), *L'Illustrazione Italiana* (1947-1948 and 1952-1953) and *L'Approdo* (1952-1954). In 1945 he edited the *Rai* production, "Chi è di scena?" Arguably, his most noteworthy and lasting contribution to the Italian theatre was his founding and editing of the widely respected *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo* in 11 volumes. In addition to *Savonarola*, D'Amico penned various works,<sup>99</sup> ranging from plays, to theatrical histories and criticisms, and wrote his only novel in the spring of 1944.<sup>100</sup> It is, indeed, a measure of D'Amico's importance to Italian theatre and of the esteem in which he was held by critics, playwrights and theatre lovers alike that, on the day of his death on 1 April, 1955, all theatres in Rome remained closed in mourning while in those of Milan, Turin and Bologna, his death was acknowledged during the interval.<sup>101</sup>

D'Amico and Rosso's *Savonarola* was staged by the *Drammatica Compagnia Stabile*, in the *Teatro Argentina*, in Rome, on the evening of 17 January, 1913.<sup>102</sup> The authors, probably due more to D'Amico's own reputation and contacts than to the theatrical merits of the play, were able to attract four very well known actors for the principal roles: Annibale Ninchi (*Savonarola*), Giovanna Scotto (*Laura Strozzi*), Ignazio Masalchi (*Lorenzo de' Medici*) and Cesare Dondini (*Maestro Ludovico da Ferrara*). Masalchi and Dondini also directed the work. Although we have no information on how many people attended this first

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45, for a complete list of D'Amico's works.

<sup>100</sup> Silvio D'Amico, *Le finestre di Piazza Navona*, (Milan, 1961).

<sup>101</sup> Sandro D'Amico, *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, p. 44.

<sup>102</sup> In the brief mention of its performance at the beginning of the work, it says: "Rappresentato la prima volta..." Silvio D'Amico, *Savonarola*, p. 4. I do not know for how long it was staged.

performance, the standing of these actors would have ensured the play received a good deal of attention.

More than any other play discussed in this chapter, *Savonarola. Poema tragico* is, for the most part, a devotional work. D'Amico, a strong and committed Catholic, would have been very familiar with the story of Fra Girolamo Savonarola and with the attention the Friar had garnered from writers and historians over the past 100 years. It is fair to assume he would have read the fictional works dealing with Savonarola, from D'Azeglio and Guerrazzi to, perhaps, Carloni and Mormone, and he would certainly have been familiar with the publications which emerged around the time of the 1898 celebrations of the Friar's death. The Catholics who, for so long, had been on the fringes of politics and often seen as a subversive influence by the ruling bodies, were now occupying a legitimate place in the political scene. D'Amico, a proud Catholic, would have followed with interest the complex situation between Church and State and the Catholics' evolving and increasingly important presence on the Italian political stage.<sup>103</sup>

In addition, the authors would have shared the views of an ever-growing group of Italians who, whilst still working to bring about an improvement in the welfare of the Italian people, were celebrating the much heralded Giolittian reforms which were well under way at the time this play was published. When the play appeared in 1913, Italy's military conflict with Turkey was coming to an end and the nation was enjoying its most prosperous time since

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<sup>103</sup> The general elections of 26 October and 2 November 1913 revealed the effects of the so called, *Gentiloni pact* between Vincenzo Gentiloni, president of the *Unione cattolica italiana*, the Liberal conservatives and Giolitti. Through this pact, the Catholics came into the Chamber with 33 members which was a considerable number and could form the basis of a true Catholic party, if this was ever needed. Interestingly, the Socialist presence rose from 41 to 78 seats and the Radicals went from 51 to 70. See William Salomone, *Italian Democracy in the Making, the Political Scene in the Giolittian Era 1900-1914*, (Philadelphia, 1954), pp. 40-41 for a clear outline of the *Gentiloni pact*. For a discussion on Italian Christian Democracy, Salomone directs us to Filippo Meda, *Il programma politico della democrazia cristiana*, (Bergamo, 1906) and Ernesto Vercesi, *Il movimento cattolico in Italia: 1870-1922*, (Florence, 1923).

unification.<sup>104</sup> Although there was still much to be done, great progress had been made in many areas and Italy had grown both economically and politically. Illiteracy levels had fallen dramatically from over 80% in 1870 to 48.5% in 1911,<sup>105</sup> and population had increased from 26,801,154 in 1872 to 35,845,048 in 1911.<sup>106</sup> In addition, industrial growth and Italian foreign trade had risen significantly and agricultural production more than doubled in the years since unification. These were relatively prosperous years as Italy enjoyed economic, social, intellectual and scientific advancement. This growth, coupled with the military involvement in Libya, led many Nationalists to believe that the young nation was finally being accorded the respect it deserved by the rest of Europe. This play, therefore, was written during a period which was vastly different from the Italy that Mormone and Carloni had commented on. Although the promises of the Risorgimento had not all been delivered, the nation was showing promising signs of growth and becoming a greater presence on the international stage. However, there was still much work to be done and, as we shall see, this play reminds the reader that Italians and, more importantly, Italian leaders, must not let this hard won prosperity cloud the need for continuing personal betterment and individual responsibility to the State. By dramatically depicting the battle between Savonarola and the Church, the play subtly condemns greed and excess whilst celebrating Christian virtues.

Interesting in structure - it contains a prologue (which is a significant part of the drama) and four acts - the play tells the story of Savonarola's life. Unlike other works we have discussed, it opens in Ferrara in 1475, in the Savonarolan household. We are presented with Savonarola's mother and his siblings. The authors immediately strive to create a stark contrast between the sombre, austere and pensive Savonarola, and his more flippant, fun

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<sup>104</sup> On 29 September, 1911, a state of war was declared to exist between Italy and Turkey and the so-called Libyan conquest had begun.

<sup>105</sup> William Salomone, *Italian Democracy in the Making*, p. 96.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95, quoting *Annuario statistico italiano*, Second Series, vol. I, (1911), p. 4.

loving brothers and sisters. Savonarola, “passa il tempo a leggere nel bosco silenziosamente” and “odia le feste...le giostre...le donne,”<sup>107</sup> whilst his sisters speak flirtatiously of balls and dances, obviously delighted at all the amusements Ferrara has to offer. It is accepted that Savonarola shunned the excesses of his native Ferrara, abhorred by what he viewed as the court’s blatant disregard for the basic teachings of Catholicism and its embracing of a more pagan, lascivious lifestyle.<sup>108</sup> This is clearly and amusingly expressed very early in the work by the buffoon, Il Frittella, who, speaking of Savonarola and his views, declares:

E chi lo udrà in Ferrara, dove il popolo  
Vive di gioia, e sino i frati ridono  
ai grassi incanti della voluttà.<sup>109</sup>

The authors use the prologue to good effect, establishing Savonarola’s character and offering an insight into his choice of a religious life. From the beginning, he is portrayed as single minded in his devotion to God and firm in his belief that the Church itself has lost its way, becoming mired in earthly pursuits and falling victim to corruption.

M’ ebbi, fanciullo, un avo sapiente; ...  
E credetti che l’albe e che i tramonti  
chiudessero giornate di sereno  
vivere; e tutto il popolo fratello  
Pensai che sorrisse e lacrimasse  
insieme, nel lavoro, nella gioia,  
o nel dolore sempre dolce un poco.  
Ma, come crebbi, fui deluso...  
Sui popoli premevano i tiranni,  
e complice a’ tiranni era la Chiesa.  
La vuota arte pagana ardeva i sensi.  
Pensai: l’ira di Dio sta sopra noi.  
Ecco, pensai, s’approssima il diluvio

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<sup>107</sup> Silvio D’Amico & G. Alessandro Rosso, *Savonarola*, p. 19.

<sup>108</sup> See Pasquale Villari, *The Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola*, (London, 1923), pp. 10-14.

<sup>109</sup> Silvio D’Amico & G. Alessandro Rosso, *Savonarola*, p. 28.

novello, che purifichi la terra.<sup>110</sup>

In this long and often emotionally charged exchange between Savonarola and Laura Strozzi, the young Ieronimo tries to explain his sense of frustration with what he sees as an increasingly empty and meaningless world. He feels that people have lost their way, rejecting the teachings of God and worshipping, instead, earthly pleasures. However, Savonarola's long exhortations take a rather interesting turn when he begins to profess his affection for Laura and his desire, perhaps, to make a life with her. He tells a stunned Laura that, in her, he feels he has found a soul mate (interestingly they have only ever shared a few words), someone with whom he can face the challenges of life:

Pensai: La gioia cristiana è questa;  
questa è la vera. S'ella non mi sdegni,  
uniremo il respiro nell'Amore ...  
Chi tremerà così profondamente  
come noi, che tenendoci per mano,  
ci sentiremo soli in mezzo al mondo?<sup>111</sup>

The tension grows as Savonarola goes on to say that he is torn between choosing a life of devotion to God and a life with Laura. When he asks her: "E chiedo a voi, Madonna: / delle due voci, quale seguirò?"<sup>112</sup> one cannot help but feel sympathy for the poor young man, torn between his love for a woman and his calling to God and unaware, at this moment, that his affections are totally unreciprocated. But his love, as the reader knows, is unrequited and Laura rejects him swiftly and without compassion, telling him that a Strozzi would never align herself with a man of such poor station:

... piccolo figlio d'una gente piccola  
gente ignota, sognaste di conquistare

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

la terra o di far nozze con la stirpe  
d'uno Strozzi? O messere, in verità,  
chi vi chiamava folle non mentì.<sup>113</sup>

The prologue closes with a dejected Savonarola declaring that he now knows which path to follow: “Ora so quale voce ho da seguire./ Gesù perdona./ Eccomi. Vengo.”<sup>114</sup>

As far as I am aware, D'Amico and Rosso's *Savonarola. Poema tragico* is the first fictional work to deal with Savonarola's love for Laura (or Laudomia) Strozzi. Although it serves to humanise the Friar and offers some reason as to why he chose a conventual life, it is based on very little historical evidence. In fact, Savonarola's alleged infatuation is only mentioned in one source, *Vulnera diligentis*,<sup>115</sup> and this is, by no means, convincing proof that Savonarola harboured any feelings for Laura Strozzi. Notwithstanding this rather dubious historical source, in offering us this young, passionate and totally human Savonarola, the authors succeed in capturing the readers' attention and ensuring that we sympathise with Savonarola, feeling his pain at having been so brutally spurned. In addition, in presenting Savonarola's disdain towards the people of Ferrara's love of shallow pursuits, the prologue establishes the main theme of the play: the rejection of material excess. This theme is explored throughout the work and, as we shall see, it is a message which the authors feel is acutely pertinent to their early twentieth century audience.

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>115</sup> Benedetto Luschino, *Vulnera diligentis*, (Florence, 2002). In the introduction, Stefano Dall'Aglio cites the three references throughout the work to the supposed love Savonarola had for Laudomia Strozzi, pp. LXVI, LXVII, LXXXIV, LXXXVI. In the first instance, he states that no biography of Savonarola has made mention of such an infatuation: “I capitoli VIII e IX sono tra i più interessanti di tutti i *Vulnera diligentis*, perché raccontano due episodi della vita del domenicano ai quali non si fa cenno in nessuna biografia. Il primo riguarda una misteriosa malattia della madre Elena e la miracolosa guarigione che l'accompagna; il secondo è costituito dalla controversa vicenda dell'infatuazione di Girolamo per Laudomia Strozzi.”, p. LXVI. In his Savonarolan biography, Villari makes mention of this allusion, in the *Vulnera diligentis*, of Savonarola's supposed feelings for Laudomia. Although he seems to give it little credence, he does not dismiss it. Pasquale Villari, *Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola*, p. 14.

Whilst the prologue gives us a glimpse into Savonarola's early life, depicting a way of life and certain episodes which, the authors feel, forged his religious mission, Act I takes us to the Medici villa at Careggi, in the Florentine countryside, in 1492. Once again, the emphasis is on the extravagance and the lasciviousness of the Medici way of life. The language is, at times, a little coarse and, as is evidenced by the *tavernaio*, Botticello's, sexually charged words:

Non ridete di me, donne, s'io porto  
una pancia rotonda! Anche la vostra  
arrotondar saprei, sol che voleste!<sup>116</sup>

Whilst these exchanges are, for the most part, pithy and entertaining, their main purpose is to highlight the stark differences between the Savonarolan ideals of purity, moral vigour and spiritual rectitude and the Medici way of life, which is depicted as being governed by base instincts and by the pursuit of wealth. This act established Florence as a city in need of redemption; a city ruled by Lorenzo Medici who has lost his way spiritually. When Lorenzo falls ill and calls for Savonarola to hear his confession, we are led to believe that even this powerful man who has lived his life accountable to no one, feels he is in need of absolution and moral cleansing. As he shouts: "No! Basta...Ho bisogno/ di verità!...di verità e di pace, oggi..."<sup>117</sup> the authors are signalling that there is hope for even the gravest sinners. Lorenzo has ruled Florence tyrannically, with little regard for the pure teachings of the Church, yet, on his death-bed, it is God's forgiveness he seeks. In an historical sense, the authors most likely took their cue from Villari, whose biography they almost certainly would have read,<sup>118</sup> in depicting Savonarola's meeting with Lorenzo and the three conditions he places on Lorenzo's

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<sup>116</sup> Silvio D'Amico and G. Alessandro Rosso, *Savonarola*, p. 71.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>118</sup> See Villari's account of Savonarola's meeting with a dying Lorenzo; Pasquale Villari, *The Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola*, pp. 148-149.

absolution. The Act closes in dramatic style with Lorenzo refusing to accede to the Friar's final demand:

**Savonarola:**

Renderai tu al popolo  
di Fiorenza l'antica libertà?

**Lorenzo:**

*lentamente accenna di no: volge le spalle al Frate: s'abbandona sui cuscini.*<sup>119</sup>

The prologue and Act I promisingly offer a good deal of action and manage to keep the readers' attention through a mixture of intrigue, drama and suspense. However, Acts II and III, whilst quite lengthy, offer little in the way of dramatic appeal. The exchanges are often quite convoluted and the action is confused by the large number of characters introduced. Act II gives us Francesco Valori, the great *piagnone* who stood by Savonarola to the end. However, his presence is overshadowed by many of the minor characters who add little to the play. The main purpose of this Act is to further explore the Savonarolan ideals of courage in the face of great adversity. It also establishes the Church as corrupt and as Savonarola's greatest enemy. When, at the close of the second act, Savonarola attacks the Church, saying it is being polluted from within: "Ahi, vescovi e prelati t'han polluta:/ ma la spada di Dio pende su te!"<sup>120</sup> the scene is set for the following act in which Savonarola attacks the Papacy. Interestingly, the attack on the Pope centres on his greed and simoniac actions, once again bringing us back to the theme of excess which traverses the play:

**Savonarola:**

È Cristo il capo:  
e il pontefice siede solamente  
vicario suo, quand'egli sia legittimo.  
Ma legittimo è forse il simoniaco?

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<sup>119</sup> Silvio D'Amico and G. Alessandro Rosso, *Savonarola*, p. 88.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

**Fra Domenico:**

... Furon viste le mule che portavano  
i sacchi d'oro entrare nel palazzo  
del Cardinale Ascanio Sforza, il giorno  
che il Borgia fu Alessandro ...<sup>121</sup>

Savonarola constantly attacks the Borgia Pope, angrily declaring: "Il Borgia non è papa!"<sup>122</sup> These exhortations, coupled with his refusal of a cardinal's hat and his disobedience to the Pope, seal his fate. Act III closes with Savonarola's emotional and heartfelt plea to God, where he begs for strength, faith and guidance to face the trial by fire to which he has been challenged. As he poignantly shouts: "Rispondi al gemito mio,/ rispondi all'urlo mio, Cristo: è la fine?"<sup>123</sup> one cannot help but be moved by this display of emotion. Once again, the authors are presenting a very human side to Savonarola as we see not just the powerful, unwavering crusader, but a frightened man confronting his own mortality who is, even if just for a moment, afflicted by the same frailties and weaknesses as every man.

Unlike many of the other works discussed, D'Amico and Rosso's *Savonarola* does not end on the day of the Friar's execution. Rather, the final act deals with the attack on San Marco by the *arrabbiati* in April, 1498, with Francesco Valori's death and with Savonarola's surrender to his enemies: "O miei figli, troppo sangue/ gia s'è sparso. Cessate. Io vado a quelli/ che mi vogliono."<sup>124</sup> The work closes with Savonarola being arrested and his enemies, led by the famous *arrabbiato* Doffo Spini, calling for his death: "A morte il Frate!"<sup>125</sup> Tellingly, the final words of the play do not belong to Savonarola, but to Doffo Spini and the *tavernaio*. As Savonarola is being led away, Doffo calls everyone to the tavern,

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129. This refers to the day when the Borgia became Pope Alexander VI.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129 & 140.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

telling them that the wine will be flowing and that, with Savonarola's demise, the good times are about to return:

**Dozzo:**

Nel refettorio è l'abbondanza!

**Botticello:**

Tracanna il vino!

**Dozzo:**

Torna il carnasciale!<sup>126</sup>

The authors have ended the play as they began it; with an emphasis on excess and moral degradation. Savonarola has finally been defeated by a much more powerful enemy and, with his fall from 'power', Florence has lost its hope of regaining its freedom. However, this work does not deal with freedom from tyranny and from foreign rule, but rather with freedom from personal greed and from the shackles imposed by the pursuit of wealth and earthly gratification. Like all the dramatic works previously discussed, this play presents us with characters who are either individuals to be admired and emulated, or whose examples are to be shunned as they have lost their way spiritually. The good are virtuous and uphold the Savonarolan ideals of love, charity, devotion and fortitude whilst the unscrupulous characters reject these ideals, following instead an agenda of greed and self-aggrandisement. Underlying all characters in the play is the Church, the great monolith which, through its corruption and its acceptance of the wrongdoings of many of its servants, is seen as being responsible for the degradation of society and the moral abyss into which many of the citizens of Florence have fallen.

Considering the play in this light and taking into account the time in which it was written, it becomes clear D'Amico and Rosso's *Savonarola* is not merely an apologetic work but rather

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

a subtle commentary on the rapidly changing Italian social climate and an appeal against institutional and personal excesses. Whereas Carloni railed against the emphasis by the political leadership on Italy's military and colonial expansion, D'Amico's and Rosso's play is a plea to the ruling parties, to the Church and to Italians to heed the warnings of the past decades and embrace a policy of renewal through restraint. Italians were enjoying new prosperity, but there was still much to be done with great numbers of the population still not receiving adequate health care, education and other basic social services. The play preaches the need for individuals to reject selfishness and greed and embrace the basic tenets of Catholicism. They call on Catholics to come together and work as individuals for the betterment of the nation. With all this in mind, D'Amico's and Rosso's *Savonarola* can be seen as a cautionary work - an appeal to the Church, the government and the Italian people to exercise self control and to work for further improvements. The play preaches restraint and eschews excess by urging Italians to live their lives in keeping with Catholic values. *Savonarola* was the perfect vehicle through which to deliver these messages. Once again, the Friar is used to highlight, through his life, the need for virtue, personal and civic responsibility and moral steadfastness. The Church, led by Alexander VI, is presented as corrupt, completely devoured by greed and rotting from within. It has lost its way, bringing the people of Florence down with it. *Savonarola* is seen as the great saviour. The authors do not present an anticlerical view in the play. Rather they are warning the Church to learn from the mistakes of the past and embrace the Savonarolan agenda of moral reform and spiritual reassessment.

This play was very much the product of the new *rapprochement* between Church and State. It can be interpreted as a contribution to the improving of relations but also as an expression of the higher expectations of Italians now that Church and State had decided to work together. In this optimistic yet tenuous climate of cooperation, D'Amico and Rosso sought to

provide guidelines on what the religious and political ruling bodies should do to benefit Italians.

## VI

The period known as Liberal Italy is often overlooked, by commentators of Italian history, as being relatively uninteresting in comparison with the heroics of the Risorgimento or the high drama of Fascism. As we have seen, however, the years from unification until the First World War, are filled with conflicting interests, political intrigue and religious and social reawakening. Throughout much of the Peninsula, especially in the impoverished South, living conditions were still poor, literacy standards low, and hygiene levels unacceptable. In addition, the rulers of this new, Liberal Italy, had to contend with a hostile Church which was antagonistic to the new State. In a country which was predominantly Catholic, this was obviously a stark problem and one which, despite the Gentiloni pact, would vex its leaders until the Lateran Pacts of 1929.

In this climate of social and political unrest Savonarola was, as we have seen, once again called upon to assist in the formation of the new nation. Although the role he was asked to play by the various authors was quite different, what was constant was his use as a symbol of national regeneration and unity. Each of the four authors discussed tackle vital issues such as poverty, prosperity and patriotism and all of them offer their own particular solutions. In the early days following unification, Mormone uses Savonarola to show the Italian people and the new governing body that Italy must follow a path of military expansion if it is ever to realise her true and glorious potential. In 1885, Carloni, having had time to assess the impact of unification and having found it wanting, employs Savonarola to condemn the ruling body's neglect of the welfare of the Italian people in favour of military expansion. Carloni's play is

a polemic against the Italian government's insistence on pursuing an agenda of military expansion, to the detriment of the nation's inhabitants. His Savonarola is a tireless religious and social crusader who refused to use force, relying instead on virtue, spirituality and compassion to achieve his objectives. Carloni uses Savonarola to excellent effect, showing how one man's insistence and unwavering belief could capture a people and change a city's and, by extension, a nation's destiny. Where Mormone celebrates colonial expansion, Carloni rejects it, pleading with the Italian people to learn from the Savonarolan example, rejecting force, corruption and greed whilst embracing virtue and altruism.

At the dawn of the new century, Savonarola was needed, not surprisingly, to play different roles from any we have seen before. The new nation was slowly being consolidated and its inhabitants had become more comfortable with this notion of "Italy." Although Church and State were still hostile to one another, there were signs that the situation was improving and, most importantly, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Catholics were about to take their place as legitimate players in the Italian parliament. Social welfare had become an important political issue and the Gentiloni reforms were beginning to take effect. Yet, according to many, there was still much to be done and it was in this context that we are presented, once again, with another fictionalised version of Savonarola. Although the Catholic reform movement of the late nineteenth century that started with scholars such as Villari and Marchese and was even taken up by Pope Leo XIII, conditioned the treatment of Savonarola by Manni and D'Amico and Rosso, it did not define it. These early twentieth century commemorative authors used the Savonarolan messages of personal renewal to call Catholics to action by urging them to reassess their behaviour and their sense of civic duty and responsibility. They sought to teach Italians the virtues of temperance, moderation and selflessness. Although Italy stood on the brink of another colonial war, the authors do not mention this, concentrating instead on Savonarola's virtues, presenting him as the tireless

crusader and champion of Catholic principles. The authors express the need for a new engaged notion of Catholicism for the nation, calling on Italians to fulfil their duty as Catholics, both to fellow Italians and to their country.

The diverse, fictional works discussed in this chapter, from Mormone to D'Amico and Rosso, once again serve as evidence for the varying and effective use made of Savonarola in the creation of modern Italy. The writers of Liberal Italy give us a new, invigorated Savonarola who, in varying ways, is used to unite the Italian people and imbue it with civic virtues and a sense of personal and national pride. It is this sense of patriotism which will be severely tested, not only during the long and desolate years of the First World War, but during the tumultuous and challenging decades of the Fascist Regime. From 1913 until the 1920s, Savonarola was put aside as the nation became embroiled in the war and in its violent aftermath. The war and its repercussions consumed the minds and hearts of Italians and Savonarola was, for a time, forgotten.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Savonarola and Fascist Italy**

## I

It was not until the Fascist period, starting in 1922, that the figure of Savonarola, once again, became very important and was used to shape public opinion and serve a political and religious end. During the Fascist Regime, Savonarola was recalled to posit a new view of the State which fitted in with Fascist ideology following the newly established relationship between Church and State after the signing of the Lateran Pacts in 1929. Fascism presented itself as the 'solution' to the post-unification problems which troubled Italy, yet the Regime was hindered, as all previous governments had been, by the Church's hostile attitude to the State. The figure of Savonarola was also employed, however, to urge Italians to follow the dictates of individual conscience, thus calling them to resist the Regime's pressures to conform to the leader's and to the Party's demands.

Since unification, relations between Church and State had been, at best, strained and, at worst, openly hostile. In 1870, the Vatican was technically under the control of the Italian government. Pope Pius IX, unable to accept the situation, refused to recognise the Italian State and excommunicated the Italian governmental leaders.<sup>1</sup> He effectively locked himself in, not leaving the precincts of the Vatican, and placed a ban on Catholic heads of state visiting Rome.<sup>2</sup> This fractious co-habitation between Church and State meant that the Italian people could not be true to their State and still follow the directives of the Pope. The Church insisted it needed some form of sovereignty to recognise that it was free and universal, rather than under the control of any one government. No Italian government, however, was willing to abandon Rome to the Papacy.<sup>3</sup> Although certain *rapprochements*, such as the Law of

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism 1870-1925*, (London 1967), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, as Seton-Watson mentions, no pope set foot outside the palace precincts for over 58 years and the ban on Catholic heads of state visiting Rome was effective for thirty four years and not finally lifted until 1920, *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871-1982*, (London, 1984), p. 84.

Guarantees in 1871,<sup>4</sup> were initiated by various governments, the vexing issue of ‘The Roman Question’, as it had come to be known, remained a thorn in the side of Italian ruling parties.<sup>5</sup>

What was needed were rulers in both the Church and in Italy willing to solve the issue who looked upon each other as allies rather than enemies. In 1922, Pius XI was raised to St Peter’s Throne and, a few months later in October, Benito Mussolini, *il Duce*, came to power.

Italy in the early 1920s was in economic and political crisis. Hopes were frustrated and dreams were shattered as the people felt that the massive sacrifices and suffering of the Great War should be rewarded with economic and social reform. None was forthcoming and the situation was worse than it had been before the War. Workers and peasants began to rise up in complaint. Ex-servicemen and the middle class felt that Italy had not been justly treated during the post-war negotiations since she had not received Mediterranean territories and African colonies as reward for being part of the victorious allies.<sup>6</sup> The people were looking for solutions that their current political leaders were not providing. The established parties were no longer able to exercise control and there was a great fear that the Socialists, emboldened by their revolutionary success in Russia, would take over Italy. This fear was most keenly felt by Catholics, large landowners, industrialists and by the middle classes. Into this climate of discontent and violence came Benito Mussolini; charismatic, forceful, eloquent.: an ex-serviceman, ex-Socialist and a journalist who promised reform and greatness for Italy.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83-84. Also, for a comprehensive discussion on the Church and the Law of Guarantees, see Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism 1870-1925*, pp. 53-61. Also, see Arnaldo S. Cortesi, ‘Italy and the Vatican in Conflict Over Lateran Treaties’, in *Current History*, vol. 30, No. 6, (New York, 2000), pp. 1007-1017.

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent discussion on ‘The Roman Question’ and relations between Church and State post Unification, see D.A. Binchy, *Church and State in Fascist Italy*, (London, 1941), in particular pp. 3-29. Also, A.C. Jemolo, *Church and State in Italy 1850-1950*, (Oxford, 1960), pp. 28-52.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Hood & Litza Jansz, *Introducing Fascism*, (New York, 1994), pp. 22-23.

<sup>7</sup> See R.J.B. Bosworth’s excellent biography, *Mussolini*, (London, 2002).

Fascism, as a ruling force, came to power on 30 October, 1922. Mussolini led his famous 'March on Rome' on 28 October 1922 and two days later he was summoned by the king to form the new government.<sup>8</sup> The term 'fascism' has, in recent years, come to denote any type of dictatorial, ruthless form of government. However, Mussolini's Fascism was much more complex and difficult to define. In essence, Fascism embraced nationalism and advanced the ideals of strength and power. It was typified by totalitarian attempts to impose State control over all aspects of life - political, social, cultural and economic - and the laws, enacted by the party, were enforced, sometimes brutally, by the militia and the police force. As Clark states, Fascism was "a number of complex local movements, linked by patriotic sentiment, by hatred of Socialism and by the myth of *Il Duce*."<sup>9</sup> Fascism, so it claimed, sought to establish the superiority of the nation over individuals or groups comprising it. All efforts were directed towards promoting the Italian nation by means of military supremacy. *Il Duce* demanded total and uncompromising loyalty and any form of subversion or open criticism of the Regime was quickly and forcibly quashed.

Although Mussolini and his party exercised almost total control over the various forms of Italian media, thereby ensuring the people read and heard exactly what he wanted them to, he was not able to control the Church. Fearing a Socialist revolution, the Vatican had covertly backed Mussolini's rise to power. Relations between Italy and the Vatican after *il Duce's* seizure of power, however, remained uneasy. The 'Roman Question' was still unresolved and Mussolini realised that he needed to resolve this issue if he was going to win over the hearts and minds of the Italian people. The Church represented an obstacle to the totalitarian regime and could not simply be ignored since it had "immense influence in education and welfare

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871-1982*, p. 221. Robert A. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, (New York), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

and proclaimed values quite incompatible with those of Fascism.”<sup>10</sup> Mussolini was in a difficult situation since he knew that, in order to rule effectively, he had to limit the power of the Church and had to do so whilst gaining endorsement of the Regime from it. He understood that such endorsement would be seen, by the people, as a truce between Church and State and would effectively pave the way for his unfettered domination of the Italian people. For its part, the Church was concerned with protecting its influence in society.

Although Mussolini wooed the Church, granting it many concessions during his first few years in office,<sup>11</sup> it was not until 1929 that a formal settlement was reached. On 11 February of that year, Mussolini and the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Gasparri, signed the ‘Lateran Pacts’ which were a treaty, a financial convention and a Concordat.<sup>12</sup> The treaty established ‘Vatican City’ – a separate sovereign state with full diplomatic rights. The financial convention compensated the Pope for loss of his pre-1870 territories by giving him 750 million lire and a further 1000 million in Italian State bonds. The Concordat, most importantly for the Church, granted it various privileges and guaranteed the future position of Catholic Action organisations.<sup>13</sup> Although the signing of the Pacts was greatly beneficial to the Church, they were a propaganda triumph for Mussolini. He had finally solved the ‘Roman Question’ by reaching an agreement with the Catholic Church. The Pope was no longer an enemy of the State and the Regime was now recognised by the Church. Binchy tells us that within half an hour of the Pacts being signed, the news had spread throughout the city and, by the end of the day, “papal and Italian flags flew side by side for the first time since 1870 from the Government buildings and almost every house in Rome.”<sup>14</sup> It was,

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>11</sup> See Arnaldo S. Cortesi, ‘Italy and the Vatican in Conflict Over Lateran Treaties’, pp. 1007-1017.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871-1982*, pp. 254-255.

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed discussion on the ‘Lateran Pacts’ see *Ibid.*, pp. 254-256. Also, see D.A. Binchy, *Church and State in Fascist Italy*, pp. 191-253.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.191.

arguably, one of Mussolini's finest moments. He had finally given the people a reason to support fully his Regime since they were no longer forced to choose between their faith and their political leadership.

Although the Lateran Pacts offered a new hope for reconciliation between Church and State, the public still needed to be convinced of the Treaty's legitimacy and effectiveness. In this new, yet false, climate of pacification, there arose a new interest in Savonarola as a figure that could help bring together the two hostile sections of Italian life:- the lay and religious. It is therefore not surprising that in the post Lateran Pacts Fascist period two plays on Savonarola should be written which used him to legitimise the new Pacts and the new order in Italy. These works are: *Savonarola*, by Giuseppe Ardaù<sup>15</sup> and *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, by Rino Alessi.<sup>16</sup> A third play, *Savonarola, poema tragico*, by Mario Montesi,<sup>17</sup> was also written but, as we shall see, delivered a different message from the previous two, focusing more on personal rather than political issues.

The three works to be discussed were written during the height of the Fascist Regime and, as such, each author would have known that, for his drama to have any hope of being staged, it would have to meet the approval of the censors. Theatre had increased in popularity and, at this time, it competed with radio, newspaper and cinema in reaching large numbers of the population. The very interesting work, *Censure teatrale e fascismo (1931-1944). La storia, l'archivio, l'inventario*, argues that in the 1930s, the Fascist leaders undertook "un progetto di propaganda di massa attraverso l'impiego di tutti i media..."<sup>18</sup> They were aware of the

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<sup>15</sup> Giuseppe Ardaù, *Savonarola. Dramma in tre atti e quattro quadri*, (Florence, 1932).

<sup>16</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, (Udine, 1935). This work, as shall later be discussed, was first published in 1933 but it is the 1935 edition which will be examined in detail in this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Mario Montesi, *Savonarola, poema tragico*, (Rome, 1937).

<sup>18</sup> Patrizia Ferrara (ed.), *Censure teatrale e fascismo (1931-1944). La storia, l'archivio, l'inventario*, (Rome, 2004), vol. I, p. 21.

power of media to control the dissemination of information and, in turn, influence the minds of the people. In order for Fascism to truly prosper, it had to win over *le masse*, educate them and, ultimately, control them. In addition, the Regime realised “le potenzialità del settore teatrale sul piano dell’*educazione nazionale*,”<sup>19</sup> acknowledging that it was more than a cultural educational vehicle or, as Mussolini himself defined it in 1924, “una scuola per educare il gusto e la sensibilità e per raffinare le doti più alte e potenti dell’anima.”<sup>20</sup>

The increased popularity of theatre, coupled with the Regime’s push for a powerful propaganda campaign extolling the virtues of Fascism, necessitated the formation of a body which would review and, hence, control the staging of theatrical works. Up until this point, the rules which governed theatrical censorship had been drafted under Crispi, in 1889<sup>21</sup> and were, considering the Regime’s political agenda, somewhat inadequate. In 1929 the Regime decided to issue guidelines which determined what sort of theatrical representation would be permitted and which would be banned.<sup>22</sup> Of most interest, for the purposes of this discussion, are guidelines 2 and 3 (see footnote) which prohibit any work which offends, even by allusion, “Il Re Imperatore, il Sommo Pontefice, il capo del governo, le persone dei ministri, le istituzioni dello Stato oppure i sovrani o i rappresentanti delle potenze estere” and which incites in the masses “il disprezzo della legge o che sia contrario al sentimento nazionale o religioso o che possa turbare i rapporti internazionli.” The legislation effectively

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23. Mussolini stated this at a speech in Rome in May, 1924.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20. It is worth noting the exclusions: “È vietata ogni rappresentazione: 1) che faccia l’apologia di un vizio o di un delitto o che miri ad eccitare l’odio o l’avversione tra le classi sociali; 2) che offenda, anche con allusioni, la sacra persona del Re Imperatore, il Sommo Pontefice, il capo del governo, le persone dei ministri, le istituzioni dello Stato oppure i sovrani o i rappresentanti delle potenze estere; 3) che ecciti nelle moltitudini il disprezzo della legge o che sia contrario al sentimento nazionale o religioso o che possa turbare i rapporti internazionali; 4) che offenda il decoro o il prestigio delle autorità pubbliche, dei funzionari e degli agenti della forza pubblica, dei militari delle forze armate, oppure la vita privata delle persone o i principi costitutivi della famiglia; 5) che si riferisca a fatti che, per la loro nefandezza, abbiano commossa la pubblica opinione; 6) che comunque, per peculiari circostanze di tempo, di luogo, o di persone, possa essere ritenuta di danno o di pericolo pubblico.”

banned any piece of theatre which could, even subtly, criticise or undermine the Regime and the information it was constantly feeding the population. It is very interesting to consider that any play which criticised the Pontiff would be banned. As will be discussed, this guideline was loosely applied, if at all, and was totally dependent on Mussolini's relationship with the Pope. If the Pope was antagonistic to the Regime and /or to Mussolini himself, then theatrical works could be used, to great effect, to sway the views of the mainly Catholic audiences.

In order to gain approval for a play, the work had to be submitted to the *Ispettorato del teatro*, which fell under the auspices of the *Ministero dell'interno*.<sup>23</sup> If a work was accepted, its title would be published in a *Bollettino delle opere autorizzate* which appeared once every three months. Once a work was listed for approval on the *Bollettino*, it could be staged repeatedly without the author having to request subsequent authorization.<sup>24</sup> Each of the authors under discussion submitted various works, including the three dealing with Savonarola, for approval by the censors. Rino Alessi, the most prolific and well known of the three, has ten plays listed on the *Bollettino*<sup>25</sup> and it is worth noting that two of these, including the 1935 production of *Savonarola*, were performed by the renowned Compagnia Emma Grammatica. This further confirms Alessi's status as an influential and well known dramatist. Giuseppe Ardaù has three plays listed for approval. One play, *Gli ultimi giorni di Napoleone*, written in 1935, was rejected.<sup>26</sup> Finally, Mario Montesi submitted three works of which two were passed and one, *Le furie e le stelle*, written in 1937, was rejected.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 24.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 607.

The first work to be discussed is *Savonarola. Dramma in tre atti e quattro quadri*, by Giuseppe Ardaù, published in 1932.<sup>28</sup> Very little has been written about Ardaù, even the details of his life are unknown.<sup>29</sup> However, it is clear that, although he was not a successful playwright and author since his works were never staged and his prose does not seem to have gained much critical attention, he was a prolific writer who was interested in history and passionate about politics. In the eleven years from 1921 to 1932 he wrote nine plays<sup>30</sup> and from 1910 to 1930 he published eleven books.<sup>31</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, *L'eloquenza Mussoliniana*, which he published in 1929, is of most interest. Although we know little of Ardaù, it appears he was an ardent supporter of Mussolini and of the Regime. The work is, in essence, a tribute to *il Duce*. In the opening pages, Ardaù expresses his admiration for Mussolini as a man, leader, politician, poet and orator:

Mussolini è un poeta, nel senso antico, uno che fa, che crea, che esprime se stesso con una pienezza ed una schiettezza che sono il segreto della sua giusta fortuna. Ha una eloquenza sua perché ha un'anima che vive con intensa e potente originalità una sua fede: virtù di pensiero e di sentimento che, accendendosi, non possono non divampare, risplendere, commuovere.<sup>32</sup>

He thinks that Mussolini's ability to lead a people, his great oratorical skills and his vision are not merely finely tuned political and social instruments, but rather divine gifts;

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<sup>28</sup> This play will also be referred to as *Savonarola*.

<sup>29</sup> There is no mention of Ardaù in either the *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, (Rome, 1954), *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, (Rome, 1960-1999) or *Dizionario enciclopedico della letteratura italiana*, (Rome, 1966). An extensive internet search also failed to find details of his life.

<sup>30</sup> In addition to *Savonarola*, Giuseppe Ardaù wrote the following plays: *La Scuola degli amanti (Una rondine...)*, commedia in tre atti, (1921); *Focolari spenti*, commedia in tre atti, 1928; *La vecchia casa*, commedia in quattro atti, (1925-1930); *Proda d'abisso*, dramma in quattro atti, (1931); *Il gioco delle maschere*, commedia in tre atti, (1931); *L'aurora sugli oleandri*, dramma in tre atti, (1932); *Caterina de' Medici*, dramma in tre atti, (Milan, 1933); *Tre episodi biblici (Davide e Salomone – Assalonne – Giuditta e Oloferne) – tre atti*, (1932). Not all publication details for all works are available. An extensive search has only found the listed details.

<sup>31</sup> Ardaù wrote the following essays: *Enrico Panzacchi, prosatore e poeta*, (Milan, 1910); *Petali sparsi, impressioni, note di critica e d'arte*, (1911); *Studi critici e letterari*, (1911-1912); *Il fenomeno Papini*, (1921); *Il lecito e l'illecito anche nella critica storica*, (1921); *La Sardegna di ieri, d'oggi e di domani*, (1922); *Il teatro italiano alla deriva*, (1922); *Tra i quadri dell'Italia che marcia*, (1929); *Sulle industrie in Sardegna* (Cagliari, 1929); *L'eloquenza Mussoliniana*, (Milan, 1929); *Teatro di prosa (pagine tifose)*, (Milan, 1930).

<sup>32</sup> Giuseppe Ardaù, *L'eloquenza Mussoliniana*, p. 16.

“doni divini.”<sup>33</sup> According to Ardaù, Mussolini had bestowed upon the Italian people the gift of Fascism, and for this, the author is eternally grateful: “viviamo giorno per giorno la fortuna del Fascismo.”<sup>34</sup> Whatever the reasons for writing this work, it is obvious that *L'eloquenza Mussoliniana* shows Ardaù to have been a believer in Fascism and felt that it was the only way for Italy to move forward and realise her true and great destiny.

Ardaù's *Savonarola*, published in 1932, is an historical play which focuses on the final six years of the Friar's life. It opens in 1492, just after the death of Lorenzo dei Medici and closes in 1498, on the day of Savonarola's execution. In the preface, Vincenzo Errante tells us that the play was “concepito e scritto per il teatro, da uomo che adora il teatro,”<sup>35</sup> and Ardaù, in his introduction, states that “questo mio dramma è stato pensato per il teatro, e, se dipendesse da me, già l'avresti giudicato; quando avverrà – credimi – ne avrò piacere!”<sup>36</sup> Despite Ardaù's intentions, I have found no evidence that the play was ever performed. The play would certainly have met with the favour of the Regime since, as we will see, there are positive references, however subtle, to it throughout the work. Most likely, it was never performed for a variety of reasons: either because of a lack of funds, sponsorship, connections or perceived merit as a theatrical production.

In his preface, Errante states that this is a work of “scrupolosa verità storica...non solo per ciò che riguarda il protagonista; ma anche per la vita infusa in tutte le altre figure del dramma.”<sup>37</sup> This is an interesting statement since one of the major dramas within the play is the unfulfilled love between Savonarola and Laudomia Strozzi. In the play, mention is made of Laudomia having rejected a young Savonarola's declarations of love, with the words that a

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> Giuseppe Ardaù, *Savonarola*, p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Strozzi would never romantically attach herself with a Savonarola. This rejection is then seen as having led the young man to turn to a life devoted entirely to God:

... se c'era la bellissima Laudomia ... Sempre bella e altera come una regina ... si sussurra che molti anni fa a ... Ferrara avrebbe riso dinanzi a un giovane che aveva lampi di fuoco nei begli occhi intelligenti e che finì col ... farsi frate ...<sup>38</sup>

As the play moves on, Laudomia's feelings for Savonarola grow and she becomes not only a devoted follower but a woman who realises that perhaps she has loved him all the while. Whilst all this detail makes for interesting drama, there is, as discussed in an earlier chapter, little evidence of its historical veracity with mention of Savonarola's feelings for Laudomia Strozzi only appearing in *Vulnera diligentis*.<sup>39</sup> In addition, in this work, there is no trace of Laudomia ever developing feelings for Savonarola, only of his infatuation with her. It is not unreasonable to assume that Ardaud had read, or even attended a performance of D'Amico and Rosso's *Savonarola*, written in 1913, which, at the end of the prologue, dramatically has Laura (Laura and Laudomia are one and the same) Strozzi rejecting Savonarola's professions of love. The scene closes with Savonarola, dejected and alone, leaving Ferrara to begin a life devoted to God.<sup>40</sup>

It appears that by emphasising Savonarola's feelings for Laudomia, Ardaud, like D'Amico and Rosso, is trying to humanise the Friar and make him a figure with which a reader or a prospective audience can identify. In so doing, Savonarola looks to be not only a devoted man of God, but also a vulnerable man, capable of the most basic human emotions and weaknesses. When, in Act II, he argues with Laudomia, accusing her of immorality in

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> See discussion on D'Amico and Rosso *Savonarola* in chapter 2.

<sup>40</sup> Silvio D'Amico & G. Alessandro Rosso, *Savonarola. Poema tragico in un prologo e quattro atti*, (Rome, 1913), pp. 40-41.

respect to her relationship with Doffo Spini, he loses his temper and falls victim to the carnal emotion of jealousy:

L'abito che indosso mi conferisce il dovere di condannare il peccato e ... voi ne vivete scandalosamente, dimentica d'un'anima che avete da salvare, d'un corpo magnifico che avete donato al piacere d'un uomo vizioso al pari di voi che se ne sazia senza amarvi.<sup>41</sup>

It is Laudomia who voices what the reader has discerned when she states "Frate, ti morde la gelosia? È la maschera che ti è caduta?"<sup>42</sup> Ardaù is trying to present Savonarola as more than an austere, single minded, intransigent figure. He realises that if his work is to be successful, the audience has to identify with Savonarola or, at least understand him. To this end, he strives to imbue his protagonist with distinctly human traits, such as jealousy and compassion and this is at its most evident at the end of Act II scene VI when, having accused Laudomia of immorality he lowers his head and whispers "Perdonatemi, Laudomia!" However, when she surprisingly asks "avete detto, Laudomia?", he quickly recovers and says, "Perdonatemi, sorella."<sup>43</sup> Savonarola has lowered his guard, if only for an instant, allowing the audience to see that he embodies the frailties and weaknesses of every man.

Although the relationship between Laudomia and Savonarola forms a large part of the drama of the play, it is not its central theme. At the heart of Ardaù's work is Savonarola's struggle against the corruption of the Church and the moral degradation of society as well as his feud with a merciless Pontiff who, ultimately, defeats him. Savonarola's struggle with the Pope is viewed from the perspective of a major dispute which had broken out between the Church and the Fascist State shortly after the signing of the Lateran Pacts. Not wishing to cast any doubt on the benefits of Mussolini's great *rapprochement* with the Church, Ardaù decides

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<sup>41</sup> Giuseppe Ardaù, *Savonarola*, p. 109.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

that Church and pope must be viewed as two separate entities. Although the references to the Regime are not overt, they are, nonetheless, unmistakable and occasioned by Ardaù's decision to come to its aid in the clash that threatened to undo the achievements of the Lateran Pacts. The play, published in 1932, not long after the great public disputes of 1931 when relations between Church and Regime had reached a crisis point over Catholic Action, addresses this contentious break from the Regime's position.<sup>44</sup>

The honeymoon period enjoyed by the Vatican and the Regime after the signing of the Lateran Pacts was well and truly over by 1932. A series of public disputes had erupted in 1931 because of Mussolini's displeasure over the expanding activities of Catholic organisations or, as the Vatican interpreted it, because of the Regime's attempts to rein in Catholic Action's movements.<sup>45</sup> The antagonism which arose from the continuing expansionist tendencies of Catholic Action, which competed with the Fascist's own youth organisations, culminated in Mussolini's dissolution of the youth organisations of Catholic Action on May 30. The Vatican's forceful and unequivocal response to the dissolution, in the form of Pius XI's encyclical, *Non abbiamo bisogno*, further strained relations between the two bodies and, even though the *Accordi per l'Azione Cattolica* of 2 September 1931<sup>46</sup> brought an end to the open hostilities, it was evident that the cordial and even sympathetic relationship achieved in 1929 had been irrevocably damaged. The Pope constantly attempted to assert the independence of the Church from the Fascist party, and openly criticised the actions of the Regime. In the years to follow, he continued to condemn the Regime's attitude towards Catholic Action, its widespread use of violence and its growing totalitarian nature.<sup>47</sup> His stand on Catholic Action had the potential to damage Italian unity, especially since, at the

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<sup>44</sup> John F. Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism*, (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 132-134.

<sup>45</sup> D.A. Binchy, *Church and State in Fascist Italy*, p. 506.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

same time he questioned the government's control over the people and cast doubt on Mussolini's leadership. In addition, the Pope was openly critical of Hitler's increasing power and of Mussolini's support of him.<sup>48</sup> Whilst he did not publicly denounce Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia, neither did he support it, which, once again, represented subtle yet powerful criticism of the Regime. The Pope's veiled condemnation of the Regime and what it stood for, threatened to undermine it by diluting the support of Catholics throughout the Peninsula.

The Pope's constant criticism of the Regime was, indirectly, also criticism of its leader.<sup>49</sup> Ardaù addresses this issue by ensuring that the notion of leadership is present throughout the play as first Savonarola, then other characters speak of the importance of strong, disciplined leadership. Without guidance and control, the population, like the Florentine '*popolo*' in Savonarola's time, would lose direction and become ungovernable and dangerous and "...come un fiume impetuoso, guarda con occhio sinistro le case dei cittadini..."<sup>50</sup> Ardaù is drawing the parallel between Savonarola's Florence and Fascist Italy and asking his readers to support their leader. The call for all Italians to remain committed to the Regime and stand united behind their leader is present throughout the play. Ardaù transposes the struggle between Savonarola and Alexander VI to the present, unequivocally addressing the current situation between the Pontiff and Mussolini. In order not to alienate Italians, still overwhelmingly Catholic, he attacks the Pope without overtly criticising the Church. He argues that the Pope does not have the interests of Italy at heart and that, if they truly love their country, Italians must reject his criticisms and instead fully support their leader. When, in the play, Pico states that "la Repubblica non può prestarsi al gioco di Alessandro VI...un

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<sup>48</sup> Peter C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce*, (London, 1981), p. 164.

<sup>49</sup> John. F. Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism*, p. 134.

<sup>50</sup> Giuseppe Ardaù, *Savonarola*, p. 56.

Pontefice indegno,”<sup>51</sup> the readers are encouraged to consider their own views regarding Pope Pius XI: Is he a good and just Pope or is he obstructing their *Duce* and hindering his vision to create a united and powerful nation?

Scene VI, Act III sees the introduction of Machiavelli. All of Ardaù’s readers would have been familiar with Machiavelli and his presence in the play adds weight to the drama and heightens the sense of historical veracity which Ardaù was trying to achieve. The exchanges between Savonarola and him are highly charged and increase the dramatic tension of the play. They are also used, however, not only to argue for lay leadership in the nation but also to present *il Duce* as a man of destiny. Machiavelli offers some of the most interesting insights of the play. When Fra Domenico tells him that Savonarola has offered Florentines much needed ideals - “ha solo offerto ideali di cui il popolo aveva sete”<sup>52</sup>- Machiavelli replies:

Sapete come si chiamano coloro che eccitano gli uomini a ideali troppo alti per l’universa mediocrità, a ideali che sono lontani dalla realtà dei loro tempi e poi sono incapaci ad adoprare i mezzi necessari per realizzarli? Si chiamano *profeti disarmati!* Ed eccolo là un Profeta disarmato.<sup>53</sup>

Savonarola goes on to say that he is armed with “la Croce di Cristo”<sup>54</sup> and had earlier said that he is armed with “la fede, la pazienza e le orazioni.”<sup>55</sup> Machiavelli, on the other hand, is telling him that faith alone will not suffice. In order for a people to be properly ruled, strength, force and discipline are needed. Indeed, in the end, Savonarola’s unwavering faith was not enough and many of the people who once followed him, finally turned against him. Machiavelli’s words invite the reader to consider that Italy is best served by a leader who is

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143. See Machiavelli’s *Il Principe*, (Florence, 1970), p. 43, for quote: *profeta disarmato*

<sup>54</sup> Giuseppe Ardaù, *Savonarola*, p. 143.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

undoubtedly a religious man, as Mussolini had shown himself to be by signing the Lateran Pacts, but who was, above all, a man of strength, guided by the needs of a nation; a man not afraid to use military force to achieve his needs.

Ardau's *Savonarola* closes with Savonarola being led to his execution. In a final dramatic turn, Laudomia is present, having been admitted to his cell to pay her final respects to the man she has always loved. She is presented as a transformed figure, repentant of her earlier ways and totally devoted to Savonarola and to his teachings. In the final scene, Ardau contrasts her forlorn state with the sounds of the baying public who call for the Friar's death. Whilst there is no historical evidence that Laudomia was present at this time (once again this contradicts Errante's claim that the work is one of "scrupolosa verità storica") it does add to the drama of the work and ensures the play ends with the public being reminded, once again, of Savonarola's human side.

Whilst Ardau's play was never performed, it was published and, most probably, achieved a certain level of readership. The play recalls Savonarola and uses him to present a view of the State which was in line with current Fascist ideology. Its defence of the Fascist state and of its ideology as well as of its leadership, together with its condemnation of the incumbent Pope, would have resonated amongst a distinct section of the Italian people and contributed to the strengthening of the Regime.

## II

The second play to be discussed and undoubtedly the best known, is Rino Alessi's *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*. Although it is the 1935 edition which will be

discussed, it is important to note that Alessi first penned the work in 1933, only a year after Ardaù's play was published. Considering the similarity of subject it is highly likely Alessi would have taken an interest in Ardaù's play and, as we will see, he takes up some of the themes Ardaù raised. He may even have looked to the work for inspiration, modifying his second edition after having noted how Ardaù was able to carefully weave support for the Regime into his historical drama. However, regardless of the influence the earlier work may have had on Alessi, what is clear is that both plays use the drama of Savonarola's life to try and solidify support for Fascism and for its leader. Both authors astutely establish a clear distinction between Church and Pontiff and, in doing so, force the reader to consider the current relationship between their government and their church.

Rino Alessi (1885-1970) was born in Cervia to a middle class family. He worked as a journalist for most of his life, taking a keen interest in politics and working as a war correspondent between 1915 and 1918 for *La Gazzetta del Secolo*. He also worked for *Il Giornale del Mondo* and was director of *Il Piccolo* in Trieste from 1918 to 1943. In addition, he freelanced for other newspapers, most notably the, by then, overtly Fascist paper, *Il Resto del Carlino*, and also supervised and worked on various radio programmes. After the Second World War, he decided to move back to his hometown where he wrote a number of novels including *Calda era la terra*, (1958), *La speranza oltre il fiume*, (1958) and *La terra e gli uomini* (1964).<sup>56</sup>

Alessi's time as a war correspondent and especially his years spent following and commentating on the often turbulent and ever-changing political climate in Italy ensured that he possessed a keen insight into the politics of the day. He would have followed Mussolini's

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<sup>56</sup> These biographical details were found on the Cervia website at: <http://www.comunecervia.it>. See also *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, (Rome, 1954–1962), pp. 283–284 for further details and a more comprehensive list of works by Alessi.

rise to power with great interest, especially considering they were both *romagnoli*. Since he wrote for *Il Resto del Carlino*, it is fair to say he would have written reports of the Fascist Regime and would have followed the evolving relationship between the Church and the Fascist party during the late 1920s. With this in mind and considering his love of theatre, it is not surprising to see him write a play in the heyday of the Fascist Regime which featured, as its protagonist, a great historical, religious person who was both a political and social reformer.

Alessi published the first edition of his play, entitled *Savonarola. Cinque atti*,<sup>57</sup> in 1933. In 1935, having organised for his play to be performed in Piazza della Signoria in Florence, he published a second edition of it, which consisted of three acts instead of the original five.<sup>58</sup> This rewritten version was performed *en plein air*, in Piazza della Signoria in Florence, on Tuesday, 28 May 1935, and on Saturday, 1 June 1935, at 9.00pm. In his preface to the 1935 edition, Alessi explains that the structural changes were necessary in order for the play to be successfully staged:

..alla luce di questa premessa debbo riconoscere che i cinque atti del primo *Savonarola* presentavano ostacoli pressoché insormontabili per il regista, sia che la scelta del luogo per la realizzazione scenica fosse un teatro di vecchio stile, pomposo di stucchi dorati e di drappaggi stinti, sia che fosse la piazza, e, nel caso nostro, una delle piazze più belle e più famose del mondo.<sup>59</sup>

Although Alessi tells us that “la sostanza dell’opera naturalmente non doveva mutare, ed infatti, non è mutata,”<sup>60</sup> he did alter substantially, upon request from the play’s director, Jacques Copeau, the format of the work in order to better adapt it to theatrical presentation.

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<sup>57</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Cinque atti*, (Milan, 1933).

<sup>58</sup> The 1935 edition contains a lengthy preface and annotations. Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*.

<sup>59</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Alessi tells us that, at the time of writing, he did not give consideration to the play's staging and to the enormous problems certain aspects of the work would have posed to a director. For example, the contrast between the first two acts, which are set in the sombre and austere environment of the convent of San Marco, and the enormous space required to represent successfully the bonfire of the vanities and the trial by fire in the final acts, was too great and would have prevented a successful representation on the stage.<sup>61</sup> However, as shall be discussed later, Alessi's reasons for altering this first edition were not confined to his desire to ensure the success of the play. He was fully committed to having his work performed. The play, in his own words, which echoed Mussolini's statements regarding his speeches, was always meant for the stage - "destinata al grande spettacolo di masse"<sup>62</sup>- and he was quite willing to make any alterations necessary in order for it to be performed in front of a vast audience, on a grand scale, in one of Italy's most famous squares. To do so, however, he needed the backing of the civic and national authorities and, above all, of Mussolini and of his Regime. He thus set out to obtain it.

The staging of the play was an enormous undertaking with 1300 characters, and mustering the whole Coro Stabile Fiorentino, directed by Fernando Previtali,<sup>63</sup> to perform musical pieces. It also boasted a number of well known Italian actors amongst the cast and there was a vast number of extras (*fanti e mazzieri della Signoria, giovani piagnoni, cantori, cantatrici, compagnacci, popolani, ecc.*) who would have all contributed to the grand nature of the production.<sup>64</sup> In fact, the performances included Dominican friars from San Marco who played themselves, giving the play greater immediacy and force. For such a work to have

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<sup>61</sup> Assessed by Ludovica Sebgondi, *Iconografia di Girolamo Savonarola*, (Florence, 2004), p. 272.

<sup>62</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti.*, p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> Mario Ruffini, 'Savonarola e la musica: dalla Lauda al novecento', in *La figura de Jerònimo Savonarola O.P. y su influencia en españa y Europa*, edited by Donald Weinstein, Júlia Benavent & Inés Rodríguez, (Florence, 2004), p. 118.

<sup>64</sup> Ludovica Sebgondi, *Iconografia di Girolamo Savonarola*, p. 273.

been performed at all, let alone in the very square in which the historical drama was played out, Piazza della Signoria, indicates that the playwright had the full support of the civic authorities who would have had to give permission for its staging. That it was such a major production and was performed at the height of the Fascist Regime, raises a number of questions. Was the play sponsored by the Fascist authorities? Was it conceived and staged as purely a historical drama? Was it primarily an entertaining piece of theatre or did it have a political message to convey and, if so, what was it and to whom was it directed? Was Alessi, like the nationalist writers before him, using Savonarola for a political end? If we examine each of these questions in turn, it becomes clear that, indeed, this play was much more than an entertaining piece of theatre.

One need only look to Alessi's own words for confirmation that, not only was the play approved by the authorities of the day, it was sanctioned by Mussolini himself. In the opening words of his preface to the 1935 edition, he writes that the work was "ideato dal Duce."<sup>65</sup> This statement cannot be dismissed as mere sycophancy and can be read in two ways: either the play was conceived by Mussolini himself and then given to Alessi to write and stage, or it was shown to Mussolini who offered substantial ideas on its staging and presentation. Either way, what is indisputable, is that Alessi was quite prepared to give *il Duce* a great deal of credit for it. It is, undoubtedly, a play written with the full consent of the Regime, and which, as we will see, endorses the Regime and, more precisely, its leader in a subtle yet powerful manner. The playwright skilfully weaves political, religious and social messages together throughout the work, shaping and manipulating the character of Savonarola, in order to pursue a political end.

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<sup>65</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, p. 9.

Alessi, moreover, substantially altered his play from the first edition in order for it to be more suitable to dramatic representation. However, it is clear that he had more in mind than critical success when he made the changes which resulted in the three act play. The more substantial changes were made, in fact, to gain the support of Mussolini. The earlier, five act work, was centred on Savonarola and had no political message to impart. It had none of the author's comments that we find in the second edition, nor the preface and the explanatory annotations. Alessi's telling views on the papacy, religion in general, politics and art are all missing from this first edition of the work. In addition, there is no mention of Mussolini or of his involvement in the staging of the play. Certainly there is no notion that the play was "ideato dal Duce," as is mentioned in the opening lines of the preface to the 1935 edition.

In view of the fact that the 1933 edition contains no preface or annotations, it can be assumed that Alessi was compelled, either by external forces or by his own understanding of the situation, to address the State-Church issue from a fascist point of view in the subsequent edition. He knew that for his play ever to be staged in the spectacular manner he wanted, it had to meet with the approval of the Regime. To obtain this approval, he was prepared to politicise the work. Although he fully intended the play to be staged, he also knew that the text would be read and examined and he wanted his views to be heard and understood by a large audience. The author realised that his work would exist in two ways: as a piece of theatre to be enjoyed by an audience and, perhaps more importantly, as a piece of written drama to be read and reread by thousands of people. Whereas the staged play would be seen by a finite number of people (we know it was staged on only two occasions), the written work would be published and disseminated throughout the Peninsula and beyond. In short, Alessi wanted to impart his message not only to theatre audiences, but to the general public, to *le masse*.

Alessi's *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, is a rich and powerful play which gives dramatic voice to the final years of the Friar's life. Set in Florence, it opens at the peak of Savonarola's influence in 1495 and closes on the 23 May 1498, on the day of his execution and of that of his two Dominican companions, Fra Silvestro and Fra Domenico. Although the play is not a totally accurate historical account of events,<sup>66</sup> it skilfully presents Savonarola as a revolutionary and fearless crusader who ultimately paid with his life for being true to his beliefs and his principles. Savonarola's character is established early in Act I while in Acts II and III, which deal with the bonfire of the vanities, the trial by fire and the final days of his life, the audience is carefully drawn into the action. Alessi highlights the courage and moral fortitude of Savonarola whilst condemning the corruption of the Church under the Borgia Pope and, in so doing, asks his audience to identify with Savonarola's great strengths and contrast these with the deplorable characteristics of Alexander VI.

The play, however, does much more than simply pay homage to Savonarola. It is a vehicle through which Alessi can posit his own views (and, as we shall see, the Regime's view) on the Church, religion and the Fascist state. More specifically, Alessi uses the play to praise the healing of the division between Church and State and the reconciliation which had been sealed with the signing of the Lateran Pacts. He realised that the Italian people needed to be cajoled, instructed and reassured that their Church and their government were now in general accord. At the same time, however, he addresses the issues that had led to disagreement between Church and State after the promulgation of the Lateran Pacts: disagreements over

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<sup>66</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, pp. 16-17. In his preface, Alessi says: "Naturalmente anche questa edizione, come l'altra, darà ai critici, che commettono l'errore di giudicare un'opera di teatro desunta dalla storia come se fosse una storia pura e semplice, qualche motivo per accusarmi di abusi proprio in sede storica."

relative spheres of influence, over the independence of the lay state, over the very loyalty of subjects.

The political message is conveyed most forcefully in the preface of the play which was added in the second edition. Through this preface, Alessi paves the way for his play to highlight all that is good and virtuous in Savonarola whilst denouncing the evil and corrupt elements of the Church under an unworthy Pope.<sup>67</sup> He is asking his readers to be prepared to criticise the Borgia Pope, whilst celebrating the glory and spiritual power of the Church. In his preface, he prepares his audience to see the very human side of the Friar – “per tutta la vita, Jeronimo è un vero uomo: la sua santità è la sua umanità.”<sup>68</sup> He also asks his audience to draw parallels between the strength, intransigence and moral fortitude of Savonarola and those of *il Duce*. But, like Ardaù, he is also setting the scene for the contrasts between the two men, a contrast inspired by Machiavelli’s treatment of Savonarola in *Il Principe*.<sup>69</sup> Savonarola, armed only with faith, did not prevail. He could not, ultimately, control the people and was, eventually, abandoned by them. Mussolini, on the other hand, inspired by his ideals and fully armed, had not only been able to reconcile Church and State but held sway over the people and was leading the nation to its true and wonderful destiny.

In addition to adding the preface and annotations, Alessi altered the body of the play. Most obviously, as we have seen, the play became a drama in three acts instead of five. However, there are more salient changes. First, he adds the narrator, Lo Spirito del Tempo, who opens each act by providing a brief introduction, setting the scene for the coming action. In addition, he often alludes to present day issues, giving the play modern relevance. He adds a

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<sup>67</sup> Alessi states: “Il mio Savonarola è il cattolico fierissimo che anticipa il rigore, l’intransigenza morale, il trasporto mistico e lo spirito di ascèsi dei più puri araldi ed interpreti della Controriforma,” *Savonarola, Azione drammatica in tre atti*, pp. 13. He goes on to say on page 15, “il suo cuore era nato per amare, non per odiare”.

<sup>68</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, p.18.

<sup>69</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, (Florence, 1970), p. 43.

sense of realism to the play, drawing the audience in and preparing it for what is to come. His main role, however, is to highlight the similarities and differences between the Florence in Savonarola's time and the Italy of 1935. The contrasts between the two Italies as conveyed in the play are clear: in Savonarola's day, Florence was ruled by an inept government which the Pope was able to influence and corrupt. The city became leaderless and the *popolo* was reduced to a cowardly and unruly mob. Alessi contrasts this situation with his view of Fascist Italy in 1935. Italy was now ruled by a strong man who brooked no interference in the State. The message he delivers is clear: Pope and Church must know their proper place and not try to exert influence, other than purely spiritual influence, over the nation. Lo Spirito del Tempo's message that Italy needed to be a truly lay state is constant and overt.

Because the second edition of the play was condensed into three acts, it is shorter than the first and all the action takes place either in Piazza della Signoria or the Bargello. In the first edition, the setting was more varied and the first two acts were set in the convent of San Marco. Alessi, however, cleverly moved some of the action to have it fit with the new settings.<sup>70</sup> Apart from these differences, many of the exchanges between the characters remain the same. As has been mentioned, it is quite clear that Alessi fully intended his work to be seen not only by an audience, but read by many more people in its published form.

Throughout the play, Alessi uses Savonarola to highlight all that is good in the Church. The Friar is seen as the embodiment of religious virtue as he strives to rid the Church, and indeed society, of the corruption and immorality which he believes have beset them because of corrupt papal leadership. Alessi wants to use Savonarola to educate his audience and he

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<sup>70</sup> For example, the first meeting between Savonarola and the papal legate, Il Monsignore, takes place in San Marco in the first edition whilst, in the second, the two meet in Piazza della Signoria.

realises that, to be successful, he needed to present a human side to the Friar. To this end, Alessi is constantly showing us aspects of his character which highlight his humanity, aspects with which the audience can readily identify. In Scene 14, Act II, when the young *piagnoni* drag the beautiful Leda, who posed naked for Botticelli, towards Savonarola and demand that she be thrown onto the pyre and be burned together with the other vanities, the Friar shows genuine compassion as he orders her to be released and charges her never to sin again: “prometti di non peccare mai più.”<sup>71</sup> Similarly, when Savonarola is facing the trial by fire, Fra Domenico declares that he will willingly enter the flames since he is convinced there will be a miracle and he will be saved. When Savonarola tells Fra Domenico not to go, his pain and fear are evident as he declares that he knows the flames will defeat him:

**Domenico:** Ma io non temo il fuoco; io sono sicuro del Cielo; sono sicuro del miracolo.

**Jerónimo:** (*gridando*). - No! No!

**Domenico:** - Perché, Padre santo?

**Jerónimo:** (*con la voce strozzata - lentamente*). - Perché io sono sicuro della morte.<sup>72</sup>

When he pleads, not long before his arrest, for the lives of his fellow friars to be saved, he is once again humanised. The audience can feel his anguish and his fear when he declares that he does not care what happens to him, but begs for his brothers to be spared:

(*Con grande passione*). - Ch’io morissi, era scritto. Ma i miei fratelli, no; sono innocenti. Va, corri, gettati ai piedi degli uomini che governano perché il Frate ha creduto nella Repubblica. Mi uccidano con tutte le raffinatezze, disperdano le mie ceneri in Arno, distruggano tutte le mie opere ... ma sian salvi per l’amore di Dio, i fratelli miei innocenti!<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, p. 113.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146-147.

These episodes contribute to shaping the Savonarolan character and making him a figure which members of the audience respect and admire. Alessi realised this was necessary if his play was going to have any substantial influence on the audience.

It was also essential for Alessi to show the public that Savonarola represents the admirable qualities of the Church. The author was acutely aware that the Italy of the 1930s was a very Catholic country, even though there were strong anticlerical elements in it. As has been discussed earlier, when Mussolini signed the Lateran Pacts, he knew he was relying on the influence of Catholicism to help his dream of Italian imperialism.<sup>74</sup> He needed to show the people that the Church fully supported his Regime since he realised that, up until this point, the conflict between Church and State had placed an “intolerable strain on the consciences of Italian Catholics, making it very difficult to be both an obedient Catholic and a good Italian.”<sup>75</sup> With the signing of the Lateran Pacts, Mussolini hoped finally to obtain the loyalty of the whole Italian people, something which no previous government had achieved and which he also had been unable to realise. He knew that, in order for the people to trust him completely, he needed to show them that he had the full support of the Church since this would enable them to reconcile their support for the Regime and their devotion to the Church.

Alessi’s emphasis on the distinction between Pope and Church is central to the play.

He was very aware of the issues regarding Catholic Action and the intransigence of the Pope and he uses his play as a vehicle through which to re-establish and strengthen support for the Regime by appealing to his audience, as Ardaud had done, to distinguish between the Church and Pope Pius XI. He wants Italians to remember that the Lateran Treaty was signed with the Church, not with an individual Pope. The Pope may be condemning the Regime, but the pact

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<sup>74</sup> Peter C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce*, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> John F. Pollard, *The Vatican and Fascism, 1929-1932*, p. 2.

with the Church has not been dissolved and it would outlive the current Pope. To convey this message, he presents the audience with the example of Savonarola's struggle with Alexander VI. Savonarola was a devoted Christian who fought for his beliefs and who sought the greater glory of the Church despite the opposition of the unworthy and self-serving Pope, Alexander VI.<sup>76</sup> Alessi realises that, in the Italy of the 1930s, a direct attack on the Pope would be counter-productive. To have Savonarola, a devout, virtuous and courageous friar lead the attack removed the danger that it would be viewed as another episode in the State-Church rivalry that had bedevilled Italian history since unification.

Alessi stresses Savonarola's strength and intransigence in the face of a corrupt and dishonest pope, contrasting his devotion, rigour and moral fortitude with the deplorable character of the Borgia Pope. He does not hide his own views on the Pope Alexander VI, stating:

Che Alessandro VI fosse lo specchio di tutti i mali del tempo e disonorasse la Cattedra di Pietro come nessun altro pontefice prima di lui, è una verità storica che nessuno può revocare in dubbio...<sup>77</sup>

He wants his audience to understand that Savonarola did not fail because his mission was flawed or his devotion and motives questionable; he failed because he could not combat the forces of the Borgia Pope and of the corrupted Florentine populace acting in unison. Savonarola's commitment to his cause, his courage in the face of growing adversity are celebrated as is the Church itself. It is the corrupt Pope whom Alessi condemns. Indeed, when, in his preface, the author declares: "Ringraziando Iddio, Alessandro Borgia non è la Chiesa."<sup>78</sup> Alessi is emphasising that popes can be either good or they can be bad, but the

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<sup>76</sup> In scene 12 of Act I, whilst speaking with Il Monsignore, Savonarola lists the sins of the Borgia Pope and, in doing so, enforces the view that the Pope and the Church are definitely not one and the same. In this way, Alessi is asking his audience to also separate Pope and Church. Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Holy Mother Church, in all her splendour, is everlasting. He reinforces this belief in his notes to the play, stating that:

Fortunatamente la gloria e la potenza della Chiesa non dipendono da un papa; e questo era chiaro anche nella mente di Jeronimo, che non è mai tanto intransigentemente cattolico come quando i suoi attacchi contro Roma e la Curia hanno la violenza e la implacabilità della folgore.<sup>79</sup>

Alessi needed his audience to understand that the Church and the Pope must be separated. In this way, he draws a parallel between the Borgia Pope and Pope Pius XI. While not so overt as to be offensive, the message is none the less clear. Alessi wanted his audience to realise that Pius XI, with his attempts to mobilize Italian youth in Catholic Action and with his subtle and constant criticism of the Regime, did not have the greatness of Italy at heart. He was trying to undermine Fascism as well as Italy's influence and prestige just as the Borgia Pope had tried to prevent Savonarola from achieving "la nuova Gerusalemme".<sup>80</sup> It is important to note that Alessi never openly criticises Pope Pius XI since to do so would have been counter productive. He is reserved and careful in his treatment of the Pope since he did not want to alienate the large body of Catholics who still owed allegiance to him. Rather, the audience is asked to draw its own inferences regarding the Borgia Pope and his destruction of Savonarola's mission in Florence and, by extension, the current pontiff's undermining of the Regime's mission in Italy.

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269. Alessi's very long notes which are found at the end of his play, from pages 193 – 310, deal with the 6 areas of: l'arte, La Politca, Il Divino e L'Umano, Jeronimo e Alessandro, Il Mistico and, finally, Leda-Maria. They offer interesting insights into Alessi's personal views on these topics.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45. Here, *il poeta* declares that Savonarola will transform Florence into *la nuova Gerusalemme* which would be a force unto itself, safe from the undue influence of a corrupt pope.

The theme of leadership and courage is also central to Alessi's play. As already pointed out by Sebreondi,<sup>81</sup> the allusions to the mission of Mussolini and Fascism are clear from the opening scene, when the narrator, *Lo Spirito del Tempo*, turns to the audience and states:

Il popolo, chiamato a raccolta in piazza per esprimere i suoi voti, è ormai stanco e invoca una legge, una disciplina, un UOMO.<sup>82</sup>

Alessi is speaking directly to his contemporary audience, telling it that Italy needs a strong, disciplined, unwavering leader if it is to fulfil its destiny. It needs someone who is not afraid to make the difficult decisions and who is capable of dealing with the Church and ensuring that it continues to support the Regime. Naturally, this man, this 'UOMO', is their leader, *il Duce*.<sup>83</sup> The play celebrates the notion of strong and efficient government and it reinforces the need for the *popolo* to be ruled and controlled by Mussolini.

The notion of leadership is always coupled with faith and religion in the play. Alessi constantly reminds his audience that religion and politics must work harmoniously if a strong and powerful state is to emerge. By doing so, he is once again praising the accord which was reached between Church and State, celebrating the endorsement which the Catholic Church has given the Regime and championing Mussolini himself. When a poet declares in scene 10 of Act 1: "Jeronimo farà di Firenze la nuova Gerusalemme. Nessuno oserà alzare le mani sulla città santa,"<sup>84</sup> a parallel is drawn between Savonarolan Florence and Mussolini's Italy as both had God on their side. Mussolini had achieved this by signing the Lateran Pacts and

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<sup>81</sup> See L. Sebreondi's article, 'Savonarola in scena', in *Bimestrale di religione arte e scienza*, July-August, 1998, (Florence, 1998), pp. 379-388, p. 386.

<sup>82</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, p. 29.

<sup>83</sup> In her article, 'Savonarola in scena', p. 386, L. Sebreondi argues that the play also refers to the fascist myth of Mussolini working late into the night, his room in the Palazzo Venezia illuminated, when in scene 1 of Act 1, a *popolano* declares: "Non dirai che i nostri Signori non hanno cura del popolo. È notte; ancora lavorano ..."

<sup>84</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, p. 45.

thus obtaining the Church's blessing of the nation whose creation had never before been accepted.<sup>85</sup>

In his work, Alessi draws parallels between the Savonarolan struggle to meld the opposing forces of Church and State and Mussolini's own victory with the signing of the 1929 Treaty. However, it is not the final outcome of the Friar's struggle which is important, but the struggle itself. Savonarola was ultimately defeated by the Borgia Pope, an earthly power greater than he, but what stands out and what the audience is urged to concentrate on is his strength, courage and great leadership. There is, however, another parallel argument being made in the play. In scene 2 of Act II, Lo Spirito del Tempo declares that faith alone is not sufficient to lead a State to its greater destiny:

Come si fonda e si regge uno Stato? Con la fede o con la forza? La fede senza la forza è come un castello senz'armi. L'uomo che sale i gradini di quella tribuna è il "profeta disarmato,"<sup>86</sup> egli non dubita della sua Vittoria perché non dubita della sua Fede.<sup>87</sup>

The contrast is clear. For Savonarola, whose only weapons were faith and spirituality, death represents a personal victory since it gives him the martyrdom he seeks. He, in short, had then fulfilled his mission. Mussolini, however, had the responsibility of leading the Italian people to its destiny. Unlike Savonarola, he has "armi" and "fede" which are needed to resist opponents and to ensure that Italy becomes a stronger and more powerful nation. Once again, Alessi is reminding the audience that Italy needs a man who has the power and the

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<sup>85</sup> For excellent discussions on the situation in Italy with regards to Church and State in the late nineteenth century, see Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871-1982*, pp. 12-179. S. William Halperin, *The Separation of Church and State in Italian Thought from Cavour to Mussolini*, (New York, 1971), pp. 1-86 and A.C. Jemolo, *Church and State in Italy, 1850-1950*, pp. 53-160.

<sup>86</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, p.43. Machiavelli immediately goes on to say that Savonarola "ruinò né sua ordini nuovi, come la moltitudine cominciò a non crederli; e lui non aveva modo a tenere fermi quelli che avevano creduto, né a far credere e' discredenti."

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78-79.

force to rule a people and to overcome the obstacles placed in his path by a recalcitrant pope whose interests were not Italian but universal.

In addition to the themes of courage, strength and intransigence, Alessi also focuses on the *popolo*. The play concentrates on the struggle for control of the *popolo* and, through *Lo Spirito del Tempo*, we are reminded that Savonarola, at the height of his popularity, had the support of the majority of the Florentine public: “Il profeta ha ormai con sè tutto il popolo.”<sup>88</sup> This struggle to win the hearts and minds of the people is central to the play since it mirrors the dispute between Church and State in Italy in the early 1930s. As we have seen earlier, the real battle being waged by the Regime and the Pope was over control of the youth and, eventually, of the *popolo* and of the nation. Morello, a fascist opponent of the Lateran Pacts, argues in his 1933 publication, that the Church sought to control the state by ‘Catholicising’ fascists.<sup>89</sup> He sums up the conflict between the Church or, more specifically, the Pope and the State by stating that the Pope wanted total control over the education of Italian youth since he realised that this was the only way to ensure that Fascism would not usurp the power of the Church. According to Jemolo, the Pope believed that the Church, and not the State, should be solely responsible for the education of the young, viewing the State’s insistence on assuming responsibility in this area with stark disapproval.<sup>90</sup> Naturally, this was in direct contrast to the goals of the Regime which realised that it had to react to keep its hold over the people. It is from this struggle that the unrest and mistrust between Mussolini and Pius XI was born.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Mussolini understood that the Church, as led by Pius XI, was the great obstacle which stood between him and total domination of the Italian people. Morello, in contrast to Jemolo and Binchy, openly puts forward the position of the Regime. He states that

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<sup>88</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, p. 119.

<sup>89</sup> Vincenzo Morello, *Il conflitto dopo la conciliazione*, (Milan, 1933), pp. 122-124, 136-138.

<sup>90</sup> A.C. Jemolo, *Church and State in Italy, 1850-1950*, p. 206.

<sup>91</sup> For an interesting discussion on Church and Fascist views on education, see D.A. Binchy, *Church and State in Fascist Italy*, pp. 434-495.

the Church should play no part in education since the responsibility to train and instruct Italian youth belonged exclusively to the State. The Church, according to Morello, should limit its intervention to religious affairs:

La gioventú appartiene esclusivamente alla Nazione, non alla Chiesa, e per conseguenza - una conseguenza che il Fascismo si è lasciata troppo facilmente sfuggire nel Concordato - appartiene esclusivamente alla Nazione ed allo Stato la scuola. Alla Chiesa appartiene soltanto la religione, per la quale ha liberi tempii, liberi altari, liberi pulpiti, che servono a coltivarla, celebrarla, difenderla.<sup>92</sup>

Morello's view is shared by Alessi and is central to the play. The author deals with this struggle for power in post-Concordat Italy, by drawing parallels and contrasts between it and the Savonarolan experience. He wants his audience to understand that interference by the Pope can be harmful and corrupting, as demonstrated by the Borgia Pope's ultimate 'victory' over Savonarola. Alessi highlights the fact that a badly led Church can corrupt the people through fear and intimidation. Indeed, Savonarola himself declares that the people have been corrupted and rendered feckless and cowardly by the clergy: "Il popolo che i cattivi pastori hanno dato all'Italia."<sup>93</sup> Alessi's message is clear. The authority of the Pope and the clergy, if unchecked, can be harmful. He is asking his audience to trust their leader, "L'UOMO", since he is not only a man of faith, (the Lateran Pacts proved this) but has the fortitude and the power to rule a nation.

To further strengthen his point, Alessi gives us numerous examples throughout the play of what can happen when a people is not properly disciplined and controlled. Savonarola, with faith alone, was ultimately not able to control the crowd, so swayed by a bad pope that it became an unruly rabble. Alessi portrays the people as being corrupted by Alexander VI and

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<sup>92</sup> Vincenzo Morello, pp. 152-153.

<sup>93</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, p. 188.

driven to excesses by him. The *popolo* becomes irrational and bays for Savonarola's own blood. Where, not long before, he was revered and adored, now he is vilified by the *popolo*. The *popolo*, manipulated by the fearsome Pope, turned on Savonarola who was not able to maintain his hold on it. Thus, Savonarola, too, is found to be wanting. He, unlike a good lay leader, had neither the strength nor the power to enforce his will on the people. Without these virtues the crowd becomes uncontrollable. Alessi is driving home the message that a people must be led not only through faith, but also with force and with discipline. This brings us back to the opening lines of the play when Lo Spirito Del Tempo addresses the audience calling for "una disciplina, un UOMO!" In so doing, he is calling on the people to accept Mussolini's rule and to put all its trust and its faith in *il Duce*. Indeed, by the end of the play, the Pope, Savonarola and the people are all found wanting: only Mussolini could deliver Italy to its destiny.

Alessi was also aware that, in order for his play to capture the interest of the audience and, hence, to be instructive, it had to have dramatic appeal. It had to be a finely produced piece of theatre since it was important for it to be well received in order to give weight and validity to its messages. The play may well have been approved (perhaps even conceived) by *il Duce* himself and it may have received the full support of the civic authorities, but it still needed to be an entertaining and moving piece of theatre in order for the audience to relate to and learn from it. To this end, Alessi was meticulous in his planning of the play. As we have seen, on the advice of his director, he substantially altered the script to adapt it to the stage. Whether he is instructing his characters on gesture, facial expression and tone of voice, or whether he

is indicating exact timing of entrances and character placement on the stage, his stage directions throughout the play are precise and very detailed.<sup>94</sup>

Alessi knew, however, that precise stage direction and interesting subject matter were not enough to ensure success. He realised he had to take some literary license to guarantee the mass public appeal of the work. To this end, he introduces certain fictional characters to the work such as the narrator, *Lo Spirito del Tempo*, which also serves as Alessi's voice throughout the play. Alessi also gives us Leda, the only woman in the drama. Her presence, whilst enabling us to witness Savonarola's compassion and understanding, also adds dramatic appeal to the play. Her story is entertaining as she manages to enthrall the audience with her beauty and her intriguing lifestyle, whilst capturing their hearts with her conversion. The playwright also introduces *Il Monsignore*, which should be identified with the papal emissary sent to interrogate and ultimately deal with Savonarola. He appears twice in the play, in Scenes 11-13, Act I and in Scene 6, Act III. On both occasions, he engages in lengthy and interesting debate with Savonarola and, although the exchanges are often complex, they are dramatic and captivating. In the first instance, he tells the Friar that the Borgia Pope is prepared to offer him a cardinal's hat in exchange for his silence. The ensuing dialogue is rapidly paced and highly charged as we see Savonarola reject the offer and proceed, audaciously, to challenge *Il Monsignor* with regards to the sins of the Pope:

**Jeronimo:** (dopo una pausa). - Monsignore, ascoltate! Potete rispondere ad alcuni quesiti? (dopo una pausa). - È vera la simonia?

**Monsignore:** (dopo una pausa). - È cosa passata in giudicato.

**Jeronimo:** - L'incesto?

**Monsignore:** (coprendosi il volto). - Cattiverie di cortigiani delusi.

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<sup>94</sup> Examples of Alessi's precision in this respect can be found throughout the work. For example, at the beginning of scene 13, Act I, p. 63, Alessi writes: "Frate Silvestro, che durante tutta la scena è rimasto in profonda meditazione, esce improvvisamente dalla sua fissità e si accosta a Jeronimo come in estasi". Another example of his meticulous stage directions can be found at the beginning of Act II, pp. 71-75, where Alessi goes to great lengths to set the scene for the Bonfire of the Vanities.

**Jeronimo:** La spogliazione dei Cardinali troppo ricchi? Le morti misteriose?

**Monsignore:** Falso, falsissimo!<sup>95</sup>

As the exchange continues, the tension builds and the audience is drawn further and further into the drama. In Act III, on the day of his execution, Savonarola asks Il Monsignore to hear his final confession. Once again, the scene is poignant and tense. The audience is swept along as Il Monsignor accuses Savonarola of being too proud and too arrogant and declares that his quest was doomed to failure since his adversary was far too strong to have allowed him to prevail:

Hai spaventato papi, re, principi, cardinali. Ti hanno temuto più del diavolo, amato quanto Dio. Ma la tua segreta superbia s'è scontrata con un uomo che aveva tanta forza per essere Papa, quanta a te manca per essere santo. Perché, mio caro frate, tante cose puoi dire di lui tranne ch'ei non sia nato per il comando.<sup>96</sup>

This exchange showcases Il Monsignore's true character. He is a clever, wily man who resorts to invoking the power of the Church when it appears he is losing control of the argument. He is a wonderful foil for Savonarola, since the Friar never wavers in his conviction, nor does he change the thrust of his argument to suit the moment. Il Monsignore's rather sly nature is contrasted with the Friar's steadfastness, adding a very interesting dimension to the drama.

The playwright's attention to detail and his desire to create an entertaining piece of drama appears to have been very successful. The play was previewed in the Florentine newspaper, *La Nazione*, 28 May, 1935 and reviewed on the 29 May, 1935.<sup>97</sup> The review, by Cipriano

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<sup>95</sup> Rino Alessi, *Savonarola. Azione drammatica in tre atti*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>97</sup> *La Nazione*, Florence, 28 May, 1935, p. 5; *La Nazione*, Florence, 29 May, 1935, p. 6.

Giacchetti, covered almost one full page of the newspaper and, by any standards, was glowing. It opens with:

Abbiamo assistito ieri sera a un grandioso originale spettacolo, che, prescindendo da ogni altra considerazione, fa onore a chi l'ha ideato e organizzato attraverso difficoltà di ogni genere e superando spesso e coraggiosamente avversità preconconcette ed ingiuste.<sup>98</sup>

It is interesting that the reviewer refers to “chi l'ha ideato” since we know that Alessi, in his preface, says the play is “ideato dal Duce.” It is not clear whether the reviewer is alluding to Alessi or to Mussolini – perhaps the ambiguity was intended. Either way, there is no doubt that the play was very well received and left an impression on many who were in the audience.<sup>99</sup> The play was also a very important social event. Indeed, the review goes on to list the dignitaries in attendance on opening night:

S.A.R. il Principe delle Asturie, l'Ambasciatrice di Francia Contessa di Chambrun, gli Accademici d'Italia Ojetti e Romanelli, tutte le Autorità cittadine, i critici dei maggiori giornali italiani ed esteri: in grandissimo numero i forestieri e le persone venute per l'occasione dalle altre città italiane.<sup>100</sup>

The audience the play attracted and the attention it received must have pleased the civic and national authorities. Equally pleasing were the messages the play conveyed in praise of the *Duce*, Fascism and its policies. Alessi's use of Savonarola to impart these messages not only raised awareness of the Friar but, more importantly, firmly established him as playing a

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<sup>98</sup> *La Nazione*, Florence, 29 May, p.6.

<sup>99</sup> Interestingly, the acclaimed Italian film director, Franco Zeffirelli, tells us in his autobiography that he, together with his small drama group, was in the audience at one of the two open air performances of Alessi's *Savonarola*. He says: “...we were so stunned by the great open-air production of Rino Alessi's *Savonarola* in the Piazza della Signoria that we decided we had to do our version. I played Savonarola in our performance in the refectory of the Convent of San Marco, a magnificent setting...I think it was this drama group more than anything else that determined the course my life was to take”. Franco Zeffirelli, *Zeffirelli. The autobiography of Franco Zeffirelli*, (New York, 1986), pp. 14-15.

<sup>100</sup> *La Nazione*, Florence, 29 May, p. 6.

pivotal role in shaping public opinion and defining Italian national identity during the Fascist period.

### III

The final play to be discussed is Montesi's *Savonarola, poema tragico*.<sup>101</sup> Like Ardaù, very little is known of this playwright's life.<sup>102</sup> It is fortunate that in his preface to the play, Lucio D'Ambra gives us a few interesting details about him. Firstly, it is worth noting that although Montesi himself does not appear to have been very well known as a playwright, he was able to secure a distinguished literary figure to write the preface to *Savonarola*: Lucio D'Ambra. D'Ambra, (1880 – 1939), author and playwright, was a literary critic and columnist for various Italian journals and newspapers including *Il Corriere della Sera*. He was also a prolific writer, not only of novels, short stories and plays, but also of biographies and historical works.<sup>103</sup> He met Montesi through a mutual friend in Rome and, upon reading a draft of *Savonarola* and, subsequently, of his other plays, became a fan of his work.<sup>104</sup> The French critic and author, Alfred Mortier, was also present at this meeting and from him, D'Ambra learned that Montesi's printed works, mostly unknown in Italy, had a small but noteworthy following in France: "...questo scrittore drammatico italiano interamente

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<sup>101</sup> This play will also be referred to as *Savonarola*.

<sup>102</sup> There is no mention of Montesi in either the *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, (Rome, 1954), *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, (Rome, 1960-1999) or *Dizionario enciclopedico della letteratura italiana*, (Rome, 1966). An extensive internet search also failed to find details of his life.

<sup>103</sup> For more information on Lucio D'Ambra, see Giuseppe Petronio (ed.) *Dizionario enciclopedico della letteratura italiana*, (Bari, 1966), p.191.

<sup>104</sup> Between 1917 and 1936, Montesi wrote 8 plays including *Savonarola*. They are: *Le voci de l'anima: poesie*, (Rome, 1917); *Danton, dramma in quattro atti*, (Rome, 1925); *La vittoria di Waterloo, fantasia drammatica*, (Rome, 1931); *A Canossa, tragedia*, (Rome, 1933); *Le furie e le stelle, tragedia*, (Rome, 1934); *La Bocca della verità, fantasia drammatica*, (Rome, 1934); *Tre amori in soffitta, commedie*, Rome, 1938. He also penned the poem *Galileo hai vinto! Poema tragico*, (Rome, 1936). In 1937, he was awaiting publication of two other works: *Chiaro di luna, lirica*; and *Lilà, dramma*. In addition, he was working on three other plays: *Il giorno dei morti*; *Arco di trionfo*; *Io ti amo*.

sconosciuto su le nostre scene ha tutto un teatro stampato che ben conosce e loda un illustre critico francese...”<sup>105</sup> This is probably due to the fact that two of Montesi’s plays, *Danton*, *dramma in quattro atti*, and *La Vittoria di Waterloo*, deal with French history.

Mario Montesi was born towards the end of the nineteenth century<sup>106</sup> and, although his first love appears to have been the theatre, he worked as an accountant at the Compagnia Italiana Turismo (CIT), most probably in order to sustain his family since his plays were never performed: “non riesce a mandare in giro le opere sue scritte per il teatro.”<sup>107</sup> D’Ambra tells us that Montesi, quite realistically, realised that his works were unlikely ever to be staged. He wrote because he wanted to, happy to see his works printed but under no illusions that they would be performed:

Non si fa illusioni. Non spera quello che per tanti anni non ha mai ottenuto: un teatro, una compagnia, un attore, il vero pubblico, la critica ufficiale al suo posto ... E nascono ancora, da un’irresistibile vocazione per il teatro, drammi su drammi scritti senza pensiero di palcoscenico, per amore puro e disinteressato dell’arte drammatica.<sup>108</sup>

The fact that Montesi’s works were never staged, however, does not mean that they were not read. Indeed, D’Ambra explains that Montesi’s written plays received numerous favourable reviews by well known critics and authors:

Montesi, autore non rappresentato, ha raccolto ritagli di riviste e di giornali, le molte lodi che critici autorevoli e scrittori di bel nome hanno consacrato negli anni al suo teatro stampato, assiduamente augurando rappresentazioni che non sono mai venute.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Mario Montesi, *Savonarola*, p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> In his preface, D’Ambra states “che già il poeta ha passato i quarant’anni,” Mario Montesi, *Savonarola*, p. 5.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Interestingly, although it appears that neither D'Ambra nor Montesi expected the play to be performed, D'Ambra felt that it was adding to the renaissance of Fascist theatre. He states in the preface:

(Montesi) sarà, tra le scoperte, la nostra scoperta più bella: un drammaturgo di più, solido e ardito, tra quelli che lavorano a ricostruire il prestigio e le fortune, in tempo fascista, del Teatro italiano.<sup>110</sup>

The statement does seem at odds with D'Ambra's and Montesi's assertions that they did not expect the work ever to be performed. Perhaps it was written in order to pressure theatrical impresarios and give the play some modest hope of being staged. In any case, it is an interesting observation by D'Ambra, which is perhaps better suited to Alessi's and Ardaù's plays since they are dramas which work towards promoting Fascism and its leader. As we shall see, Montesi's messages are rather different.

Montesi knew that his previous plays had received favourable critical attention so he could have been reasonably confident that this latest work would have also been quite widely read. Even though, as we are told, he harboured no hopes for its staging, he would have had a Fascist audience in mind when he penned *Savonarola* since it was written in 1937 at the height of Mussolini's power and influence. Although this play has none of the overt references to the Regime of Alessi's play, like the two earlier plays discussed, it offers the reader the stark contrast between the virtuous, committed and devout Savonarola and the corrupt and self interested Pope Alexander VI. Like them, this work offers a new view of the State and of the more favourable relations established between Church and State with the signing of the Lateran Pacts in 1929. It builds on the messages disseminated to a wide audience by Alessi and, to a lesser extent, by Ardaù, by emphasising that Church and Pope

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

must be viewed as two separate entities. However, as we shall see, the play goes further than this and examines the notions of personal responsibility, conscience and integrity.

Montesi's *Savonarola* is an unusual play as its protagonist is never physically present on the stage and only his voice is heard in three scenes. Despite his bodily absence, his presence pervades the entire play and is felt in every scene of the work. As D'Ambra states, Montesi "preferisce far attivo nel dramma, in un'angusta assenza della persona, il suo eroico spirito."<sup>111</sup> This is a play which celebrates Florence, faith, political and personal liberty and Savonarola, who lost his life fighting for them, is undoubtedly its hero.

The play opens in 1492 and closes with the execution of Savonarola, Fra Domenico and Fra Silvestro. Although it offers an account of Savonarola's final years, it does not claim to be a strictly historical representation of the Friar's life. Montesi presents many characters throughout the work and some, such as Francesco Valori, Lorenzo de' Medici, Alexander VI and his son, Cesare, are historical figures, whilst others, such as the young and lovely Maria and the brave but gormless Gianni, are purely fictional. These fictional characters and their stories of love, bravery and jealousy add interest to the work and would have given it wider popular appeal. However, all in all, the large number of characters renders the play cumbersome and it is difficult to imagine how it could have been successfully staged. Montesi tries to incorporate the major elements of the Friar's life into his work and, in doing so, no one episode is treated particularly thoroughly. Savonarola himself is presented as the tireless crusader, working in the name of God to protect Florence and to save its people from moral decline. He is contrasted with the Borgia Pope and with his son, Cesare, whose corruption and immorality are more starkly presented than in the two previous works.

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

This portrayal of the Pope as someone who is working against the Church and who is ultimately threatening the freedom of Florence and the wellbeing of its people is one of Montesi's main themes. This is what a Fascist audience would have been most able to relate to since, at the time of publication as we have seen, relations between Pope Pius XI and the Regime had deteriorated dramatically. Mussolini's alignment with Hitler and Nazi Germany were additional reasons for this worsening relationship. Pius XI's criticisms of Mussolini and of the party constantly threatened to undermine the people's confidence in their leader and he had become a thorn in the side of the Fascist government.<sup>112</sup> Like Alessi and Ardaù before him, Montesi realised that, even though Fascism continued to be popular, the majority of the population could be swayed by the Pope's criticisms of the Regime and of its policies, in particular its aggressive foreign policies.

Montesi devotes an entire scene to an exchange between Pope Alexander VI and his son, Cesare. Interestingly, although the Pope is presented as Savonarola's enemy throughout the play he is also portrayed as a tired, almost repentant figure who is controlled by his ambitious, evil son. The exchange opens with Alexander's horror upon learning that Cesare has murdered his brother: "Figlio dannato! Che n'hai fatto, stanotte, di tuo fratello?"<sup>113</sup> When Cesare admits to murdering him - "ho ucciso il Duca di Candia, mio insolente fratello, con deliberata volontà"<sup>114</sup> - he accuses his father of having been the instigator of the evil deed: "se io sono stato il braccio, tu sei stato la mente dell'impresa."<sup>115</sup> The sorrow at his son's murder and the part played in it by Cesare cause a crisis in Alexander. There is historical evidence that the murder of his son caused him enormous grief and led him to

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<sup>112</sup> For a discussion on the deteriorating relations between Pope Pius XI and Mussolini, see John F. Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism*, in particular chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

embark on a programme of reform which he did not eventually carry out. For a while, according to Villari, he even contemplates mending his ways and accepting Savonarola's calls for a reform of the Church:

This monstrous deed stirred even the heart of Alexander Borgia to agonies of paternal grief. For the first time in his life he seemed to repent of his numerous sins, and determined to renounce them. He had accordingly withdrawn into strict solitude, and appointed six cardinals to reform the Church and thus remedy the many evils to which it was a prey.<sup>116</sup>

Montesi's Alexander VI appears truly sorry for his ways and desperate to find some sort of inner peace. There is an awareness of his own failings and of his sins and he sees himself as partly responsible for the murder of his son.

Intendo che tu assomigli al demonio che da lunghi anni mi possiede. E vedo nel tuo volto l'immagine scellerata della mia lunga empietà ... Ho bisogno di pace. Datemi pace, ombre implacabili dei miei molt'anni e vedete che son uomo sciancato, se già fui uomo orgoglioso e insaziabile.<sup>117</sup>

However, what is most surprising is Montesi's treatment, at this point in the play, of Alexander VI in relation to Savonarola. The Pope, in trying to convince himself and his son that he is no longer the all-controlling, morally corrupt man of old, also interestingly declares his desire to save Savonarola's spirit, admitting that he is a true and honourable soldier of Christ:

E un altro non voglio spegnere, Cesare, malgrado voi tutti, sciagurati consiglieri, ed è quello del Savonarola ... E crediamo nel giusto figlio nostro Savonarola, soldato meritevolissimo di Cristo.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Pasquale Villari, *Life and Times of Savonarola*, (London, 1923), p. 550.

<sup>117</sup> Mario Montesi, *Savonarola*, p. 117.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115,118.

Although historically based, Montesi's depiction of Alexander in this scene needs explanation. There is a further element here that may suggest a political intent by Montesi. He may have chosen to portray him in this way in order to send a message to his audience that the Pope, despite his allegedly absolute power in the Church, could be swayed and misled by evil counsellors, the "sciagurati consiglieri", and by their bad advice. Montesi's message, therefore, could be an optimistic one: reconciliation between Pope and State is still possible once the "sciagurati consiglieri" are removed and narrow ecclesiastical interests are abandoned. In this way, Savonarola could be viewed as an instrument for Alexander's repentance and, as such, he provides an example of the present Italian and Papal situation.

In examining Montesi's treatment of Alexander VI, I consider, however, that the play is not merely a piece of anti-papal propaganda. On the contrary, its central theme is not a political one. Rather, Montesi is looking at, and asking his readers to consider, the issue of conscience and individual responsibility. Alexander VI's acknowledgement of his own weaknesses and his human frailties, coupled with his seeming desire for repentance, send a message that a sinner, however great his crimes, can be redeemed. In presenting the Borgia Pope's fallibility and his own horror at his actions and those of his son, Montesi could well have been gently criticising the current Pope, asking his audience to accept that perhaps their Pontiff should also be examining his own conscience. On a deeper level, Montesi is exploring the entire issue of responsibility and to what extent each individual has a duty to abide by the dictates of conscience. Through his powerful presentation of the confrontation between Alexander VI and Cesare Borgia, Montesi is saying that individuals can be guilty of crimes they may not have personally committed, if their behaviour or apathy caused others to do them. Alexander VI had betrayed the duties of his high office with his compliant attitudes to his son and was, therefore, just as guilty as Cesare for the latter's murder of his brother. In taking this stand,

Montesi asks the readers to live in accordance with the dictates of their own conscience or to assume responsibility for the crimes committed by others in their name. Though not clearly expressed for obvious reasons, he condemns the apathy and the conformity which could lead to crimes like the killing of the Borgia sibling or the execution of the exemplary Savonarola, whose actions had always been characterised by the highest moral standards.

In contrast with Fascist ideals, Montesi, through Savonarola, celebrates the individual. He implores each of us to stand up for what we believe in despite the fact that it may be in stark contrast to what the politicians and leaders of the day are advocating. In this way, Montesi's play, although not well known and hardly noticed at the time, has a more powerful and broader message than either Ardu's or Alessi's. Whereas the two other plays discussed in this chapter enforce the Regime and call on the public to support Mussolini, Montesi's work, very subtly, can be seen to be undermining Fascism and its leader. The fact that the play was passed by the censors indicates that they either did not understand the messages of the play, or did not share this particular interpretation of the work. I believe, however that Montesi's message of the importance of duty, responsibility and the need to be governed by the demands of conscience rather than those of a particular leader, underscores the entire work. Considering this interpretation, it is clear that, for Montesi, Savonarola was the perfect choice of subject. He is a wonderful example of someone who listened to his moral voice and acted in accordance with his conscience even though, in so doing, he went against authority. Savonarola was aware of the dangers he faced, yet he stood firm in the face of adversity, never compromising his beliefs.

Montesi's play would have undoubtedly led the reader to think about the current political situation in Italy and to consider the complex and evolving relationship between Church and

State. However, on another level, the readers may have also been encouraged to consider their own actions in relation to the Regime and to the Church. Perhaps they would have questioned their own conscience and their own sense of personal duty. They may have wondered how many, if any, of their values and beliefs they had compromised in order to live as the Regime demanded.

On a deeper level, Montesi's play explores not only the notion of personal repentance, but of national repentance. Can an entire nation be found to be wanting? Can a people be encouraged to go against previous beliefs and act in ways which, earlier, would have seemed unacceptable, because they are told to do so? Although such a discussion is beyond the scope of this work, it is interesting to consider. The questions Montesi raises are not confined to the Italy of the 1930s. What renders this play so interesting is that the issues it highlights are as relevant today as they were in Fascist Italy and, indeed, as they were in fifteenth century Italy. Similarly, the Savonarolan values which Montesi praises are no different from those which have continued to be celebrated over the past five centuries.

#### IV

Whilst the three plays discussed are, essentially, historical representations of Savonarola's life, they served a greater purpose than merely presenting updated biographies of an interesting and revolutionary figure. Whilst all three plays were written during the turbulent Fascist period, they did not have the same messages. The first two plays discussed, Ardaù's and Alessi's, recalled Savonarola and used him to help the process of reconciliation between Church and State which had begun with the signing of the Lateran Pacts in 1929. As we have seen, these works also sought to assert the primacy of *il Duce* and of the Regime in post-

Concordat Italy. The final play by Mario Montesi focuses more on personal rather than political issues. It examines the notions of individual responsibility and repentance and looks at the need to be true to one's own conscience. In the play, Savonarola is used as a vehicle for Alexander's repentance. Savonarola represents virtue, morality and the true spiritual church whilst Alexander VI and his son show the evil possibilities of absolute power. Savonarola's envisioned church and Alexander's Papacy are starkly contrasted.

Fascist Italy was a totalitarian Regime where individual needs and wants were to be put aside in favour of the national interest. In such a state, it was increasingly difficult to live according to the demands of personal conscience. Montesi, however, is asking the individual to examine this situation. On a broader scale, perhaps he is questioning whether an entire nation should allow itself to be subjugated by an individual and his regime. Montesi subtly suggests that the nation should look at itself and seek redemption for acquiescing to political demands which, in conscience, it should have rejected.

The issues Montesi raises are far broader than those of Ardaud and Alessi. They are issues which are relevant to any person or any nation in any time. His play subtly celebrates the notion that the individual must stand up for what he believes in, despite personal risk, and not betray his own sense of duty. In this light, it is easy to see that Savonarola, moral crusader, man of integrity and unwavering faith, was the perfect vehicle through whom Montesi could deliver his messages. Indeed, although the three plays discussed use Savonarola in differing ways to convey numerous messages, it is clear that the political climate of Fascist Italy provided wonderful opportunities to present him to the people and use him to serve political, personal and religious ends. Savonarola's capacity to fill whatever role was allocated to him is clearly displayed by the works written during the Fascist period. Indeed, the fact that

Savonarola, committed man of God and defender of liberty, was used to champion a totalitarian regime is testament to the complexity of the man and his apostolate, but also to his place in the collective memory of Italians. Whether he is used to highlight the distinction between Church and State and thereby ratify the Regime, or whether he is presented in order to condemn the ideology of Fascism, what is indisputable is that, once again, Savonarola has been employed to help shape public consciousness and, in so doing, assist in the formation of modern Italy.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Savonarola and Post-World War II Italy**

## I

Mussolini, portrayed by Alessi as a saviour of Italy, had forced his countrymen into a war for which it had been ill prepared and the nation was soon suffering its devastating effects. Towards the end of 1942, the Fascist regime was collapsing and the war was all but lost. Mussolini had brought Italy into a war for which there had been little public support, and the nation was paying a heavy price as a direct result of his miscalculations and hubris. The Italian Navy and Air Force failed to control the Mediterranean Sea and, in addition, by May 1943, Italy's African Empire was completely and ignominiously lost.<sup>1</sup> The questions being asked throughout the Peninsula were complex and vital: who would rule Italy should *il Duce* be overthrown and how could Italy extricate itself from this mess? The King, the Pope and the politicians were all scrambling to find a solution to what appeared to be an increasingly dire situation. In this time of crisis, it fell to the King to assume a leadership role. Victor Emmanuel III, although rather indecisive and uninspiring, had occupied the Italian throne for 43 years and still had the army, which owed him allegiance, at his disposal.<sup>2</sup> As the King pondered whether a royal military coup would suffice to topple Mussolini, the situation began to crystallise in 1943 when the Allies, led by Roosevelt, made it clear that peace would not be offered to Italy as long as Mussolini remained in power. On 24 July the Grand Council met to discuss the fate of Italy's dictator and forced him to hand in his resignation. The following day, Mussolini met with the King, hoping for a reversal of the decision, but was dismissed and arrested. The Ministry of the Interior was occupied as were Fascist Party Headquarters. It appeared that Fascism had fallen in a surprisingly bloodless *coup d'état*. Instead, in the following two years, Italy became a battleground in which Allied and German forces fought for supremacy while a civil war was fought by Italians. It was not until Mussolini's

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Kogan, *A Political History of Postwar Italy*, (London, 1966), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1971-1982*, (Essex, 1984), p. 296.

execution in 1945 that the Regime disappeared totally. When it did, post Fascist Italy emerged as an anti-military, anti-war and, more importantly, anti-Fascist society.<sup>3</sup>

With the fall of Fascism, political parties which had been suppressed under Mussolini began to re-emerge. The Communist party, founded in Italy in 1921 as “an extreme left-wing splinter of the Socialists,”<sup>4</sup> reappeared and grew rapidly, due to its skilful organisation and adequate finances, and by 1945 had a total of 400 000 card carrying members.<sup>5</sup> The Socialists were another party eager to reassert themselves on the Italian political scene. It had been one of the largest parties, together with the Popular Party, in the final years of the pre-Fascist period, yet it lacked the skills to survive underground and it did not enjoy the vital protection of the Vatican. Consequently, its power base was significantly eroded but it still had a strong tradition on which it could capitalise. The final party to appear as a potential political force was the Christian Democrat Party. It emerged as the successor to the old Popular Party, founded by Don Sturzo in 1919, which had been sacrificed by the Vatican in order to effect an agreement with the Fascists and defeat Socialism. The Christian Democrats, like the Popular Party years before, were a collection of disparate groups with very different interests and orientations. Supporters ranged from landowners to workers to industrialists. What brought them together was Catholicism and a fear of post-war left-wing extremism.<sup>6</sup> The Church symbolised authority and stability. After the massive upheaval of the war years and the turbulence of the Fascist decades, stability was something which many Italians craved. In addition, the Church, notwithstanding its historical signing of the Lateran Pacts, could still claim to have kept some distance from Fascism and thus appeal to a greater number of people. Although the Christian Democrats were not nearly as well organised as

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Italy since 1945*, London, 1971, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Norman Kogan, *A Political History of Postwar Italy*, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

the Communists or the Socialists, they had an invaluable network of Catholic parishes spread throughout Italy which enabled them to reach their electorate. The party could also hope to rely on the efforts of parish priests and lay workers to raise awareness and, most vitally, funds for its activities.<sup>7</sup> These elements combined to ensure that the Christian Democrats would become the most prominent political force in post-war Italy, maintaining their dominance for decades.

The most striking aspect of post-war Italian politics was the purging of Fascists and of their sympathisers. *Il Duce* himself was executed. The monarchy was abolished. Indeed, the fall of the Italian monarchy happened in a surprisingly peaceful manner. On 2 June, 1946, a referendum was held which decided its fate. The vote delivered a republican majority (54.3%).<sup>8</sup> The House of Savoy was punished for Victor Emmanuel III's errors and cowardice. Italy had decided it no longer wanted to be ruled by a royal dynasty and Umberto II, after a feeble attack on the veracity of the referendum results, left for exile in Portugal.

On the same day as the referendum, the Constituent Assembly elections were held. Of the six parties, only three drew mass support. The Christian Democrats won 35.2% of the vote (207 seats) and were the largest single party. The Communists won 104 seats and the Socialists 115.<sup>9</sup> A new government consisting of the three main parties plus the Republicans was formed. A pattern for the future was now established with the Italian Republic having three principal parties and the Christian Democrats governing the nation but in alliance with other parties.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-31.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871-1982*, p. 319.

<sup>9</sup> The Party of Action won 7 seats and dissolved the following year. The Democratic Labour Party won 9 seats and the Liberals 41. The new 'Party of the Average Man' won 30 seats and the Republicans 23: *Ibid.*, p. 319-320.

In addition to the elections of 1946, the Constituent Assembly was also charged with drafting a new Constitution. On 22 December 1947, after lengthy debate, the Constitution of Italy was approved with 453 votes for, 62 votes against and 3 votes cancelled. It took effect on 1 January 1948 and signalled a radical change for Italy. The Constitution, with its provisions and guarantees for civil and political liberties, the de-centralisation of bureaucracy and the granting of degrees of autonomy to some regions made possible the great improvements that followed. In addition to the new Constitution, the elections of 1948 heralded great change for the nation. The Christian Democrats, who campaigned as the party of liberty and freedom and who had the strong backing of the Church, secured an extraordinary 48.5% of the vote, with the Communists and Socialists winning 31% combined. Italy was now led by a Government which genuinely sought the best interests of the people. This factor is the greatest differentiator between Italy after 1948 and at any other time in its short history as a unified nation.

With the help of the USA, the nation began to rebuild after the war and was spectacularly successful.<sup>10</sup> The economic miracle of the 1950s and early 1960s ensured that most Italians reached an unexpected level of prosperity. There were still problems, but the population knew that things were changing and that its elected rulers, however inefficient, had the interests of the people at heart. Certainly, there was still a degree of unrest, mostly amongst students, unions and the unemployed who were often too young to remember the dark days of the Fascist regime and thus recognise the relative peace and comfort which they were now experiencing. There was also a rising culture of violence and the emergence of political

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion on Italy's economic revival after WWII, see Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988*, (London, 1990); and Patrick McCarthy, *Italy since 1945*, (Oxford, 2000).

terrorism was a cause for grave concern.<sup>11</sup> However, the nation, now stronger and more cohesive, was able to fight these new foes and by the late 1970s the terrorist threat had drastically subsided. The Red Brigades, arguably the best known of the terrorist groups, lost much support when, in 1978, they murdered Aldo Moro, president of the Christian Democrat Party. By the beginning of the 1980s, they were no longer a substantial political threat. In fact, by this time the nation was a prosperous, diverse and relatively safe society. The economic crises of the 60s and 70s had been weathered and the terrorist threat had largely been countered. Italians were enjoying a time of wealth, good education, good health and, most importantly, freedom. Italy was no longer concerned with patriotic notions of expansion and colonialism. All that disappeared with the World War II defeat and with the creation of the European Common Market, of which Italy was a founding member. All the nation's efforts were focused on the betterment of the people's lives and on improving Italian society.

The second half of the twentieth century saw the Italian economy become one of the largest and most successful in the world: prosperity, however, did not translate into universal happiness for its citizens or greater social harmony. Italy was enjoying a period of unprecedented success and Italians, for the most part, were wealthier than ever before. However, as Paul Ginsborg states, the “new wealth did not possess by itself ... alchemic qualities for society as a whole, a capacity for creating greater social cohesion or social happiness, let alone an increased faith in the *res publica*.”<sup>12</sup> Post-war Italians were materialistic and individualistic with little civic sense and with little commitment to social reform. Although materially wealthier than ever before, and despite the fact that Italy had been a nation for well over one hundred years, Italians “seemed poorer in terms of collective

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<sup>11</sup> By the 1970s, terrorist acts had become fairly common with official figures recording over 2000 a year. Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871-1982*, p. 386.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents, Family, Civil Society, State, 1980-2001*, p. 30.

identities.”<sup>13</sup> This modern Italy is a society focused on the individual, where notions of self are paramount, and in which moral and civic duties are held in little regard. It is a society where a movement like the Northern League can thrive and where its inhabitants can gradually become disconnected from their past and from each other.

## II

It is fascinating to consider what role, if any, Savonarola was asked to play in this fast changing, post World War II Italy. The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Friar’s birth fell in 1952, early on in Italy’s period of post-war reconstruction. A committee, led by the historian and Savonarolan biographer, Roberto Ridolfi,<sup>14</sup> determined to publish all of Savonarola’s writings. This massive undertaking culminated in the publication of the *Edizione nazionale delle opere di Fra Girolamo Savonarola*. Ridolfi, together with his collaborators, wanted to uncover the real Savonarola; a man whom they felt had been misrepresented and manipulated so many times that his true self had been obscured. In a pre-publication pamphlet, the committee writes: “Del Savonarola, infatti, e delle dibattute e delicate questioni che a lui si riferiscono, si parla quasi sempre con singolare leggerezza, attraverso, cioè, un’informazione di seconda mano”. It goes on to say: “... si è voluto premettere per illustrare la opportunità e l’importanza di una edizione integrale di tutte le opere del Frate ferrarese. Il quale, per tal modo, rivelandosi finalmente nella sua piena schiettezza, darà la vera misura di se stesso quale oratore, teologo, moralista, mistico, filosofo e poeta. E darà attraverso codesti

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> In 1952, Ridolfi published his acclaimed Savonarolan biography, *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola*, (Rome, 1952).

molteplici aspetti, la misura della sua potente personalità religiosa, della sua integra forza morale, dell'altezza del suo martirio".<sup>15</sup>

By publishing his writings, the committee hoped the real Savonarola would emerge. Indeed, it was determined that Savonarola's memory had been distorted for too long and that it was time to discover and celebrate the true man. No longer could the Friar be seen solely through the eyes of nationalists, politicians, social reformers or Fascists. He had been used and called upon to play so many different roles that, perhaps, it was no longer possible to know who he really was. This project, undertaken on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Savonarola's birth, also took place at a time of great reassessment for Italy. In the 1950s Italy was in the fortunate position of being guided by a constitution, which was accepted and had been a result of collaboration between all parties, and by a government, however divided it may have been, which championed the interests of the population. It was an Italy no longer in need of figureheads to show its inhabitants the way forward. The figure of Savonarola was no longer needed to point the way to unity or to expansion or to ratify the Fascist Regime. Ridolfi and the commission for the publication of Savonarola's works sought instead to turn the attention on Savonarola himself; on the "historical" Savonarola and, in so doing, show him as a man of great courage, spirit and conviction, whose strength and moral rectitude could help to teach human values and virtues.

The move to publish the Friar's works was motivated by the desire to provide an historically sound view of the Friar. Earlier, as we have seen, nineteenth-century scholars such as Villari and Marchese, while acknowledging Savonarola's human side, sought above all, to present him as a revolutionary social and political reformer. Ridolfi and his colleagues, though

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<sup>15</sup> Pre-publication pamphlet for *Edizione Nazionale delle opere di Fra Girolamo Savonarola*, (Rome, n.d.), pp. 3-4.

accepting in fact these studies, went further and strove to reintroduce Italians to the real, historical Savonarola by publishing all his works. Only by turning to these works would it be possible, so they believed, to capture the real essence of the Friar. They thus paved the way for a different, more diverse presentation of the Savonarola that was more firmly grounded on his writings and on his actions. By the close of the twentieth century, there occurred, as a result, a wide reassessment of him. This, in turn, had an effect on the fictional representations of Savonarola. The fictional works written about him between 1948 and 1998, represent a paradigm shift in the treatment of Savonarola by Italian authors. No longer is he politicised and manipulated in order to present a particular view or push a specific political agenda. Although Savonarola had earlier been treated as a champion of peace and humanity, it was always done to serve a greater political and social purpose. Now, however, with Italy basking in its new found wealth and stability, the authors who chose to write about him in a fictional vein, did so in order to celebrate him and his extraordinary life. These works, although not well known, sit alongside the vast number of historical works published during the second half of the twentieth century and contribute to our greater understanding of Savonarola and of his teachings.

This renewed interest in the historical Savonarola culminated in a number of cultural, scholarly and religious events which were held, from as early as 1995, to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Friar's death. One of the major events which took place was the "Studi savonaroliani" seminar, held in Florence on 14-15 January 1995.<sup>16</sup> As Konrad Eisenbichler states, the seminar "set the course for a renewed examination of the Ferrarese

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<sup>16</sup> The seminar was held under the auspices of the Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, the Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, the journal *Memorie Domenicane*, the Accademia Toscana di Scienze e Lettere "La Colombaria", the Comune di Firenze and the Regione Toscana. In all, from 1995 to 1998, the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary saw four seminars, three study days and two international conventions organised in Ferrara and Florence.

friar and his influence on the history, culture, and spirituality of late Renaissance Florence.”<sup>17</sup>

This was made clear from the opening statement by Donald Weinstein who states that:

nessuna delle due narrazioni retrospettive può costituire la base per quella ricostruzione veramente storica che io credo dovrebbe essere qui il nostro obbiettivo comune e insisto nel dire che è giunta davvero l’ora di liberarci da entrambi le tradizioni, quella *Piagnone* e quella *Arrabbiata*.<sup>18</sup>

In order to assess Savonarola through an accurate historical and philological lens, research needs to free itself from the traditional shackles by which it had been constrained. By no means diminishing the valuable work done by past historians, Tanzini states that until the 1950s, Savonarolan studies were defined, to varying degrees, by the large division in the way the Friar was viewed.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, he had been seen as Church reformer, dedicated man of God, impassioned preacher, visionary and champion of liberty. On the other, his detractors had denounced him as a heretic, a fanatic, a reactionary who aligned himself with the French and refused to entertain any views contrary to his own.

Whilst the viewing of Savonarola and his works through the dichotomy of *Piagnone* and *neo-Piagnone* vs *Arrabbiati* and *neo-Arrabbiati* helped to ensure his effectiveness in the many roles he had been asked to play, it is no longer adequate if we are to arrive at a greater understanding of this complex and controversial figure. In this way, the end of the twentieth century saw an outpouring of historical reflection on Savonarola which has “ereditato la ricchezza degli studi dei due secoli passati, da Villari a Ridolfi, da Pastor a Schnitzer,

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<sup>17</sup> Konrad Eisenbichler, ‘Savonarola Studies in Italy on the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Friar’s Death’, in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 52, (1999), pp. 488.

<sup>18</sup> Donald Weinstein, ‘Studi savonaroliani: passato, presente e futuro’, in *Studi savonaroliani. Verso il V centenario, atti del primo seminario*, (Florence, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Lorenzo Tanzini, ‘Dieci anni di studi savonaroliani. Tra celebrazione e ricerca’, in *Archivio storico italiano*, 2005, Florence, 2005, p. 763.

offrendo quindi la possibilità di un ripensamento globale della figure del frate ferrarese.”<sup>20</sup>

The traditional biographical method of assessment gave way, to a certain extent, to a more holistic method of examination where Savonarola was explored from diverse angles. From the way in which his relationship with Florence and her people changed over time, to the movement he inspired and the effects it has had on subsequent generations, to the search for a more accurate appraisal of him and of the place he holds in modern society, Savonarolan studies have changed dramatically over the past half century.<sup>21</sup>

### III

From 1948 until 1998, in the midst of this renewed interest in the historical Savonarola there were seven fictional works produced, all of them dealing, to varying degrees, with his life. These works, six plays and a poem, are not well known. Although five were published, I have found documentation of only three of the plays being staged while the authors of two others told me that their works had been staged, on one occasion each, in local theatres. For the most part, these works were written for local consumption, as it were, and disseminated amongst a small, dedicated following. These writers, despite their different approaches, took Ridolfi’s injunctions to heart. They sought to present Savonarola “nella sua piena schiettezza”;<sup>22</sup> a Savonarola devoid of political and rhetorical accretions and intents. The works highlight Savonarola’s virtues and present him, above all, as a man who displays the strengths and weaknesses of everyman but overcomes his limitations by the exercise of

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>21</sup> For an overview of what has been published on Savonarola in the past decade, see *Ibid.*, pp. 761-780. Also, for a comprehensive examination of major trends in Savonarolan studies during the twentieth century, see Donald Weinstein, ‘Hagiography, Demonology, Biography: Savonarola Studies Today’, in *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 63, No. 3, (Sep. 1991), p. 483-503. See also C. Vasoli, ‘Da un centenario all’altro. Bilancio degli studi savonaroliani’, in *Una città e il suo profeta: Firenze di fronte al Savonarola. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi*, (Florence, 2001), pp. 3-35.

<sup>22</sup> See pre-publication pamphlet for *Edizione Nazionale delle opere di Fra Girolamo Savonarola*, (Rome, n.d.), p. 4.

virtue. Although his life is spectacularly eventful, he is seen as a model for human behaviour to which all can, and should, aspire. The writers of the second half of the twentieth century did not endow Savonarola with foresight, nor with anachronistic views and attitudes towards Italy. Instead, they sought to explore his humanity and present it to the people as something to be adopted. Although the reasons for choosing Savonarola as protagonist are quite different from those of earlier writers, the notion of Savonarola as an exemplar is not.

The seven works are: *Savonarola*, by Fulvio Failla; *La persecuzione e la morte di Girolamo Savonarola*, by Mario Prospero; *L'ultima notte di Savonarola*, by Gian Pietro Testa; *Saio e porpora*, by Franco Fochi; *Savonarola. Dramma in quattro atti*, by Vincenzo Arnone; *Gerolamo Savonarola. Melodramma in tre atti*, by Elio Pecora and *Quella sera in San Marco*, by Mario Vezzani.<sup>23</sup> Six of the seven works deal with Savonarola as man of God with the seventh, interestingly, portraying him as a lay-person.<sup>24</sup> This unusual interpretation does not, however, give us a totally different aspect of Savonarola since, like all the works, it presents him as an example of virtue and *dovere* and as someone to be admired. Whereas previous authors had presented Savonarola with the aim of shifting public opinion and of stirring a people to action, these modern writers strive to offer us his human side as an example of behaviour and rectitude. Italy is changing and these writers are fully aware of this. Now, in stark contrast to what had previously occurred, Savonarola is no longer needed to convince Italians to create a nation or to turn Italy into an imperial, colonial power or to become the harbinger of a Fascist, political order. The objectives now are far more modest

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<sup>23</sup> Fulvio Failla, *Savonarola*, (Milan, 1957); Mario Prospero, *La persecuzione e la morte di Gerolamo Savonarola*, (Rome, 1978); Gian Pietro Testa, *L'ultima notte di Savonarola. Dramma in un atto*, (Ferrara, 1989); Franco Fochi, *Saio e porpora*, in *Savonarola, Quaderni del quinto centenario (1498-1998)*, (Bologna, 1997), pp. 157; Vincenzo Arnone, *Savonarola. Dramma in tre atti*, (Not published. The author told me it was written in 1998); Elio Pecora, *Gerolamo Savonarola. Melodramma in tre atti*, (Not published, circa 1998), Mario Vezzani, *Quella sera in San Marco*, in *Quella sera in San Marco*, Mario Vezzani, (ed.), (Florence, 1997), pp. 3-36.

<sup>24</sup> Gian Pietro Testa's Savonarola is a lay-person.

and in keeping with Italy's new-found prosperity and reduced but comfortable role in Europe and the world. The writers of this period use Savonarola to address the social ills besetting post-war Italy. It is a society in which everyone is concerned with his/her own interests and in which a sense of social responsibility has been lost. The authors mentioned, through the example of Savonarola's life, tackle the issues of charity, social commitment and civic duty. By presenting Savonarola's vices and virtues, the authors confront the problems of a nation undergoing a huge transformation by showing Italians how to behave.

Although different in both style and content - with most authors dealing with Savonarola's life from 1493 to his execution in 1498 and one (Testa) taking a particularly unusual look at his final hours - these works share an interest in the personal qualities of Savonarola. They are celebrations of a man who lived an extraordinary life and who, by his steadfastness and his commitment to his own Christian values, changed the course of a city's, and by extension, a nation's history. They are linked in their scope and in their message since they address, in their own way, the issue of nation building. However, they do not present this aim as a "national" objective, but as a personal one, achieved through character building. The writers want to show Italians, through the example of Savonarola, how individuals should behave. In so doing, their works raise the issues of unity, charity, common purpose and civic responsibility. These works were not written to reach a wide section of the community. They are not noteworthy for their literary merit and, as opposed to earlier works discussed, they do not seek to convey political or imperialistic messages. They are not overtly patriotic and they were not written in order to unify a people or change government policy or public perception. Nor are they indictments of the Church or defences of it. One could argue that the works and, indeed, the playwrights are the products of the very society they are criticising: a society which, in the views of these writers, is no longer concerned with the

great issues of unification, of prestige, of expansion and so on, but a society which is struggling to cope with rampant individualism and with a widespread lack of civic sense. The authors use these works to express their own frustrations over modern Italian society and, through Savonarola's personal example, seek to teach Italians how to improve conditions in Italy by becoming more civically minded.

Although I have not been able to ascertain when or where Franco Fochi's play *Saio e porpora* was performed, Fra Tito S. Centi tells us in the preface to the play that it was reviewed quite favourably by Giovanni Visentin in *Fiera Letteraria* on 20 May, 1955.<sup>25</sup> Fochi's play is set in Florence and depicts, quite accurately, Savonarola's life from 1492 to his death in 1498. Presumably written not long after the war, the play's characters are either supporters of Savonarola and, as such, good and worthy of imitation, or his enemies and, therefore evil and despicable. The author's admiration for Savonarola and for his actions and commitment to his beliefs is evident throughout the play. We are constantly asked to compare the virtues of the Friar with the unscrupulous and corrupt nature of his enemies. Not surprisingly, the *arrabbiato* Doffo Spini, represents the villainous and selfish aspects of Florence as he and his supporters work to bring down the Friar. The materialism of certain aspects of Florentine society and, by extension, modern Italian society, is portrayed by Doffo's cousin, Sandro, who when speaking of Savonarola, declares:

Spera che tutta Firenze diventi un convento domenicano ... Già non vedi più una donna, per la città, che non ti sembri una suora da capo a piedi. A far un po' di baldoria non ci siamo più che noi pochi: gli altri, tutti, alla predica o alle processioni del frate. Processioni ogni giorno.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> I have found no evidence that it has been staged since.

<sup>26</sup> Franco Fochi, *Saio e porpora*, pp. 86.

Fochi presents his anti-heroes as indulgent and malicious, plotting to destroy Savonarola so that they may continue to enjoy their own hedonistic lifestyles. This is in direct contrast to Savonarola and his faithful followers, led by the heroic Francesco Valori, who are willing to sacrifice everything, including their lives, for their beliefs. Fochi's aim is simple as he hopes to use the example of Savonarola and of his supporters to guide Italians and help them to become more civically responsible.

Even though it was written after one of the most dramatic and catastrophic periods in modern Italian history, Fochi's play has no political agenda. In common with the post-war works, *Saio e porpora* does not attempt to criticise or to praise the current political system. Nor does it ask readers to draw conclusions about the Church or their relationship with it. The play, lengthy and rather cumbersome in structure, was written in order to reacquaint people with Savonarola. This was a period of great change in Italy and many people viewed the newly emerging society with apprehension. Christian values were no longer seen to be driving the actions of ordinary Italians. Fochi's play is the first fictional, post-war work which raises the issue of the Italians' lack of civic commitment. Through the presentation of Savonarola's life, Fochi offers his readers and spectators the choice of abandoning individual pursuits and egoism and adopting instead the life of virtue and commitment advocated by Savonarola. Fochi argues that the Italy of his time is threatening to become a materialistic, self-serving society with no ideals to guide it in the future. When Savonarola speaks of the decadence and selfishness which is engulfing his beloved Florence, Fochi, in turn, is commenting on modern Italian society:

Oggi eccomi nel cuore d'una Firenze tutta vizio e malvagità, tutta risse e brutture ... Tu, Signore, mi ci hai portato, e proprio a me ordini di lavare le sue macchie, di cacciarne via Satana, che ne ha fatto un suo regno prediletto.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71.

Savonarola believes he has been sent by God to cleanse Florence and, by presenting him to post-war Italians, Fochi is hoping that his memory and his example of self sacrifice, poverty and humility, can reinvigorate a people and lead them on a path of moral and spiritual reassessment. In asking Italians to follow Savonarola's teaching and to imitate his life, Fochi is, perhaps, demanding more than was ever asked of them before and certainly more than they were prepared to give.

Similar to Fochi's work, Fulvio Failla's poem, *Savonarola*, uses the Savonarolan examples of virtue and of suffering and sacrifice to highlight what he perceives as the deficiencies of modern Italians concerned more with the concept of self than with the greater common good. The poem was published in 1957, at the time of the unfolding of Italy's "economic miracle," and is remarkable for its devotional tone and the way in which the author condemns the increasingly materialistic nature of Italian society. At the end of the poem, Failla includes a *preghiera* which beautifully encapsulates his thoughts and those of the other modern writers who chose Savonarola as the exemplar for Italians to follow. It is not known who wrote the *preghiera* since Failla does not attribute it to anyone; indeed, it may well have been written by Failla himself. It is a plea, written to Savonarola, asking that his memory be revived in order that his teachings and his example may instruct an Italian people which has, in a moral and civic sense, lost its way:

Tu, se pur volgi a questa terra l'occhio,  
vedrai che ancora in mezzo a noi sei vivo ...  
... Nel petto  
la tua parola vive arde innamora  
di purità, di carità. Gerolamo  
Savonarola, accogli la preghiera,  
dunque, di tanta giovinezza sola!  
Parlaci: al secol vano in che viviamo,  
il vizio è ritornato, il tradimento,

la faccia pallida d'ipocrisia.<sup>28</sup>

Here the author is speaking directly to post-war Italians, reproaching them for their vanity, their selfishness and their lack of involvement in the community. The people are being asked to learn from the Savonarolan example and emulate his *purità* and *carità*. By incorporating this prayer, Failla is emphasising that his work is supposed to instruct and to help heal what he sees as modern Italy's ills. After the lyrical and rather convoluted nature of the poem, the *preghiera* brings the reader back to the reason for writing the poem which Failla states in his preface:

Accolgano i lettori con amore il poemetto, che con amore e passione fu concepito e scritto, e guardino alla figura di questo uomo di Cristo per sentirsi più forti, più puri, più cristiani. Se tanto avverrà, l'opera amorosa non sarà stata scritta invano.<sup>29</sup>

Failla's poem, perhaps more than any of the other modern works, is a devotional piece, written by a man who is an ardent and unashamed admirer of Savonarola. In the preface, he states that it is his long held dream that, during his life time, he will hear "la voce augusta e solenne d'un Pontefice proclamare a tutto il mondo la santità di Gerolamo Savonarola."<sup>30</sup> This open declaration of support and love for Savonarola, written at a time defined by love of wealth and self advancement, draws attention to the Friar's attributes: his poverty and modesty, his strength and conviction in the face of mounting adversity. Failla's admiration for Savonarola and his desire to reconnect him with modern Italians is a reminder that the Savonarolan messages of hope and Christian virtue were seen by some as not only valid but necessary in post-war Italy.

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<sup>28</sup> 'Preghiera' in Fulvio Failla, *Savonarola*, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Fulvio Failla, *Savonarola*, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

It was not until the end of the 1960s that another fictional work on Savonarola appeared in Italy. Mario Prosperì's *La persecuzione e la morte di Gerolamo Savonarola* is arguably the best known of the post-war fictional pieces. The play was the closing act of the XXIII Festival Internazionale del Teatro di Prosa in Venice, performed at the Teatro Corso di Maestre on 10 October 1969. It was reviewed favourably in several major newspapers, including *L'Osservatore Romano*, *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*, all of which praised the young Prosperì's ambitious theatrical production.<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, however, the Catholic newspaper, *L'Avvenire* was specific in its criticism. Odoardo Bertani praised aspects of the play's structure by commenting: "l'opera ha una sua dignità strutturale, una sua semplice efficacia, una sua sincera e ordinate pronuncia, una sua evidente onestà intellettuale."<sup>32</sup> However, he also criticised the play's depth and its lack of substance. Although he praised the performances of Giovampietro (Alexander VI) and Antonio Battistella (Savonarola), he is less enthusiastic about the other cast members and ends his criticism with a stinging attack on the stage direction and the production itself:

Se il Giovampietro è un Borgia a tratti azzeccato, se Antonio Battistella è un Savonarola per nulla fanatico, ma fermo uomo di fede costruito con tecnica notevole, e momenti di intima forza, il resto della compagnia non sembra avere avvertito - o non è stata avvertita - che non si recita come nel 1930. In sostanza, non è stata compiuta la necessaria analisi, particolareggiata del copione, da tradurre in segni scenici conseguenti, ben oltre una correttezza pittorica e di movimenti.<sup>33</sup>

Mario Prosperì told me that he felt Bertani's criticism reflected the views of most Catholics towards his play since he was, in essence, attacking the rigidity and controlling aspects of the Church.<sup>34</sup> The play was written in 1966, one year after the conclusion of Vatican II (1962-

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<sup>31</sup> Odoardo Bertani, in his review of the play of 11 October 1969 in *L'Avvenire* tells us that Prosperì was not quite 30 when he wrote the play and that it was "la sua prima vera opera di teatro."

<sup>32</sup> Odoardo Bertani, *L'Avvenire* newspaper, 11 October 1969.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> I was fortunate to meet Mario Prosperì in Rome, on 12 May, 2001 and discuss his play with him.

1965), and was an attempt to raise Savonarolan awareness once again and bring this revolutionary figure to the attention of modern Italians. Prosperi felt that, in the 1950s and 1960s, Italy was suffocating under the weight of its own success and that, as a consequence, the average person had lost their way both spiritually and morally. He felt that Italians needed to be inspired and to be reminded that they must take responsibility for their own actions and thoughts. Although Pope Paul IV and Pope John XXIII had brought about many changes through Vatican II, Prosperi felt there was still a long way to go. He believed that Savonarola, the revolutionary who stood firm against the authority of the Church and who devoted his life to his cause, was the perfect example of strength and conviction to present to the Italian people. Prosperi uses his play to instruct modern Italian since, as he said, he felt that Italy was becoming a society based on “le banche, la moneta e l’egoismo.” Italian society was in need of a spiritual cleansing and Prosperi’s Savonarola embodies the spirit of renewal and reassessment which the author thinks Italians must embrace.

Mario Prosperi’s play gives dramatic voice to the struggle between Savonarola and Pope Alexander VI, placing particular attention on Alexander’s conscience and his own internal conflict. Interestingly, although it is Savonarola and his courage and virtue which permeate the entire play, it is Pope Alexander VI who features most frequently. The Savonarolan teachings of hope, intransigence and fortitude are constantly reinforced throughout the work and are beautifully juxtaposed with the Pope’s sense of guilt, primarily due to his complicity in his son’s murder by Cesare. He is also burdened by his desire for some sort of repentance. The Pope’s acknowledgement of his own greed and corruption is set against the selflessness and, indeed, hopelessness of the Savonarolan experience. The reader is all too aware Savonarola may have been defeated by a more powerful foe, but his example lives on to inspire future generations.

Throughout the play, good is set against evil, contrition against arrogance and Christian conscience is contrasted with political power and greed. Savonarola represents liberty and freedom, while the Pope, as we would expect, stands for tyranny and corruption. Even though Alexander is shown to be aware of his own moral shortcomings, he is seen to be unable to redress them. Prosperi's technique of presenting Savonarola's story in parallel with that of Alexander VI's, further emphasises the stark differences between the two men. Borgia and his court, corrupt and debauched, are contrasted with the austere and pure actions of Savonarola. The corrupt nature of Alexander VI and his raw ambition are perfectly captured in his speech:

Ho voluto essere papa. Gli italiani adoravano il talento, la bellezza, la cucina, la pompa delle vesti e persino le sacre cerimonie; e io piegai l'animo iberico a tutte le paganità degli italiani. Li ho superati, godo la loro adulazione, mi hanno eletto papa.<sup>35</sup>

This corruption is pitted against the simplicity of Savonarola and of his followers. Alexander VI represents greed and moral degradation, Savonarola and his followers symbolise hope, courage and liberty. When Savonarola angrily exclaims: "Io non voglio cappelli, né mitrie grandi né piccole. Non voglio se non quel che tu hai dato ai martiri: un cappello rosso, un cappello di sangue questo desidero..."<sup>36</sup> we hear all the hope and the frustration of his life's experience. He is willing to sacrifice everything, including his life, for his beliefs. Alexander, on the other hand, being bereft of basic Christian values, has spent his life in search of power and self aggrandisement.

Similar to many of the works discussed earlier, and also to most of the other post-war fictional pieces, Prosperi's work is one of contrasts: of light and darkness, of good and evil.

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<sup>35</sup> Mario Prosperi, *Savonarola. La persecuzione e la morte di Gerolamo Savonarola*, p, 103.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p, 113.

During the 1960s, Italy was experiencing its economic revival and the people were no longer interested in greater social issues. Italian society was becoming defined by materialism. In highlighting Alexander VI's moral degradation, Prosperi draws attention to these societal ills and asks Italians to learn from the past. His play is a call for moral rejuvenation and he uses Savonarola and his life example to show Italians how to behave. The work, like Failla's and Fochi's, delivers a social warning. Through the dramatic representation of the contrast between Savonarola and the Borgia Pope, Prosperi is holding a mirror to his own society and to the Church which is meant to guide it, forcing them to look within and acknowledge their deficiencies. As Savonarola forcefully states:

Io voglio dei pastori poveri, senza onori, senza privilegi e compromissioni con i potenti e non gli uomini di guerra ... dei pastori che pascano il gregge e non se stessi. Io voglio dei pastori liberi, non sottomessi ad altra forza che la verità, che ci fa liberi. Io voglio pastori coraggiosi, che ardiscono predicare tutto il Vangelo, anche dove condanna il Dio delle ricchezze; che siedano a mensa con coloro che sfruttano e che trattano ingiustamente i figli di Dio!<sup>37</sup>

we hear Prosperi speaking of his own society and of its leaders both lay and religious. Italy is wealthier than ever before but what price has it paid for its prosperity? According to Prosperi and the other fictional Savonarolan commentators of the period, the price has been high: loss of integrity and an abrogation of Christian values.

Of the four other post-war plays dealing with Savonarola, three can be readily discussed together since their themes and message are the same. Arnone's *Savonarola. Drame in tre atti*, Pecora's *Gerolamo Savonarola. Melodramma in tre atti*, and Vezzani's *Quella sera in San Marco*, all present, in varying ways, Savonarola's life. The plays are quite simple in structure and in language and follow traditional methods of Savonarolan representation. Once again, all characters are seen in relation to Savonarola and, from the outset, we are

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

given a choice between good and evil. Arnone, a priest and admirer of Savonarola, told me that he wrote his play because he felt Italy was in need of a new moral crusader; someone who could deliver Italian society from the grip of materialism and individualism.<sup>38</sup> Arnone felt that by choosing Savonarola as protagonist, he could offer the Italian people someone to whom they could relate since he was not only an impassioned preacher and devoted man of God, but also an intellectual, a champion of the poor, a defender of liberty, a revolutionary, a poet and a prophet. By calling upon him, Arnone was hoping to show Italians how to improve themselves and their relationship with God and with their fellow men. Arnone wrote the play in 1996 and, as he says, “il mio testo teatrale è stato rappresentato il 4 e 5 novembre 1997 al Teatro Reims di Firenze. La risposta del pubblico è stata buona; anche le opinioni dei critici sono state positive.” According to Arnone, one critic wrote: “Questa rappresentazione è un invito a conoscere un dramma che pone interrogativi anche agli uomini di oggi; interrogativi sociali e di coscienza.”<sup>39</sup> Arnone wanted his play and his Savonarola to instruct and guide his audience. His work is an appeal for a moral cleansing of society and, according to the mentioned critic, his message was effectively conveyed.

Pecora's and Vezzani's plays, like Arnone's, are unsurprising in their treatment of the Friar. There is a clear delineation between all characters with *Piagnoni* and *Arrabbiati* engaging in heated debates throughout the works. Savonarola and his followers are the champions of freedom, virtue and honesty whereas his enemies represent greed and corruption. Interestingly, Pecora includes the character of Laudomia and mentions, albeit briefly, Savonarola's unrequited love for her. The work is very formulaic and predictable and the inclusion of Laudomia merely serves to confuse the reader. Whereas Pecora's play, as far as I know, was neither staged nor published, Vezzani's was performed by the Piccolo del Teatro

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<sup>38</sup> I had the privilege of meeting Padre Vincenzo Arnone in Florence on 26 April 2001 and discussing his work with him.

<sup>39</sup> As told to me by Vincenzo Arnone. I have not been able to locate the actual review.

Comunale di Firenze in Arezzo on 5 and 6 February, 1998 as part of the celebrations for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Friar's death. The production was reviewed favourably in a number of newspapers both for its innovative staging (for example, Savonarola was played by a woman)<sup>40</sup> and for the messages it conveyed. The reviewer for the *Corriere di Arezzo* captured both the play's mood and its greater relevance by stating that it put forward:

Argomenti attuali e coinvolgenti, che non possono lasciare indifferente e incuriosito il pubblico ... È un esperimento profondo, a tutto tondo, importante non solo per il suo valore storico, ma anche di riflessione individuale ed umana.<sup>41</sup>

Once again, this play opened a dialogue about the diminishing sense of social and civic responsibility apparent in Italian society. Savonarola is used to teach the Italian people that they must assume responsibility for their own actions rather than feel that wealth and success are rights which can be exercised at all costs. As the play's director, Gianfranco Pedullà states, Savonarola's role is to help "restituire all'uomo la responsabilità della propria esistenza."<sup>42</sup>

In 1989, a very interesting and unusual work by Gian Pietro Testa was published, *L'ultima notte di Savonarola. Dramma in un atto*. The play is basically a monologue disguised as a dialogue. The action takes place, as the title suggests, on the night before Savonarola's execution and is a conversation between Savonarola and a character called *coscienza* who is, essentially, Savonarola's own conscience. *Coscienza* is used as a vehicle through which Savonarola can express his own feelings and emotions and, in so doing, helps to humanise the Friar. In fact, Testa originally conceived the play as a monologue but he was asked to

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<sup>40</sup> According to Gianfranco Pedullà, the play's director, a woman was chosen so as to help portray Savonarola's sensibility and "la dimensione di tragica solitudine." As quoted by Paolo Neri in his review of 5/2/1998 for *Spettacoli Arezzo*.

<sup>41</sup> Review. *Corriere di Arezzo* 5/2/98.

<sup>42</sup> As quoted by Paolo Neri in his review of 5/2/1998 for *Spettacoli Arezzo*.

change it to a dialogue in order to make it more suitable for staging.<sup>43</sup> In this way, *coscienza* was included and is, in essence, Savonarola's alter ego. Throughout the work, Savonarola expresses his commitment to his cause and his readiness to die for his beliefs. We sympathise with him since we know that, at this point, his battle has been lost. Testa wrote the play in order to express his disdain for the materialistic society Italy had become. Quite interestingly, his Savonarola is a layman. According to the author, he did this in order to make Savonarola more accessible to everyday Italians and to show that the Savonarolan message is relevant to all people, not just to religious devotees.<sup>44</sup> Savonarola is presented above all else as a revolutionary, who, by virtue of his strength of character and unwavering conviction, changed the course of Florentine history. Unlike the other works discussed, neither the Church, nor the Pope nor Florence and her people feature in this play. This humanist treatment of Savonarola places him at centre stage (quite literally) and the play focuses entirely on what can be achieved, by one man, through courage and commitment. Testa felt that modern Italian society was in need of a cultural and moral revolution and that, perhaps, people needed to look to the past in order to move forward. This sense of renewal and of hope for a new and better future is conveyed by Savonarola as he says:

E pure oltre il giardino  
il sogno un giorno era nato  
che gli uomini non fossero  
fetidi guasti e morti,  
che ragione infine avesse sconfitto  
l'inganno e il tradimento ...  
Che amore  
si fosse fatto cemento  
per combattere insieme,  
che amore fosse il nostro governo ...

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<sup>43</sup> I had the pleasure of meeting Gian Pietro Testa in Ferrara on 4 May 2001 and discussing his play with him. He told me it was staged on one occasion in Ferrara in 1994 although I have found no evidence of this.

<sup>44</sup> As told to me by Gian Pietro Testa in Ferrara, on 4 May 2001.

che violenza non sia  
la stupida guida  
del faticoso cammino dell'uomo.<sup>45</sup>

Through Savonarola, Testa is expressing his hope for a new tomorrow, free from greed, from corruption and from violence. His messages are simple yet powerful as he calls on Savonarola to reassure Italians that they should aspire to a purer, more selfless life. Testa's Savonarola is a moral crusader who, through the example of his own life, is used to instil hope in a people who, according to Testa and to the other authors discussed, has lost its way. Savonarola rejected materialism and blatant displays of wealth whilst living a life of modesty and humility. Testa hoped that his example could help combat not only the increasing violence in society, but also slow the march of consumerism which was gripping modern Italy. As Gianni Venturi wrote in his preface to the play, "E alla luce dell'oggi il grido di Savonarola acquista più inquietanti e dolorosa risvolti."<sup>46</sup> Similarly, for Testa, Savonarola remains as relevant in modern society as he was in the fifteenth century and his play, although not well known, is a good example of how Savonarola's humanity has been used by modern writers to emphasise the need for a change in societal attitudes and priorities.

The works just discussed all present a common view of Savonarola's place in modern Italian society. No longer the figurehead for rebellion or political change, he has become, above all else, the hero of civic virtue, of selflessness and of commitment to Christian values. Through him, the authors of these plays are showing modern Italians how to behave and how to become better citizens. The plays are primarily a call for moral renewal and although they do not have the complex and far reaching messages of the earlier works, they show us, once

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<sup>45</sup> Gian Pietro Testa, *L'ultima notte di Savonarola*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, preface. p. 7.

again, how the ever changing figure of Savonarola has been used to draw attention to society's needs and, in turn, teach Italians how to fulfil these needs.

## **Conclusion**

Italian fictional writers from the early 1800s until the mid twentieth century offered us wonderfully complex, diverse and provocative versions of the Ferrarese friar. Whether portrayed as apocalyptic preacher, reformer of a corrupt church, saviour of souls, millenarian prophet, committed man of God or social and civic revolutionary, he is, as Weinstein states, “a man for all seasons.” This is not because of one essential quality, but rather for the “range and diversity of his roles.”<sup>1</sup> This diversity in his presentation has also seen Savonarola used, albeit for different reasons from those of Italian authors, by foreign writers such as George Eliot and Thomas Mann. Although beyond the scope of this work, it is fascinating to consider Savonarola’s influence beyond the Peninsula. However, it is in Italy that the Savonarolan legacy is strongest and the rediscovery of the historical Savonarola by Italian authors has enabled us to stand back and examine more closely this most interesting of Italian figures. Whilst we are still too close, in terms of time, to assess fully the implications this turn in Savonarolan scholarship will have on our evaluation of the Friar in years to come, what it has undoubtedly done is to highlight the extent to which Savonarola has been manipulated and distorted over the previous two centuries. This earlier exploitation, varied and purposeful, has taken many shapes and it is only with the benefit of time and with the advantage this historical perspective affords, that we are able to draw conclusions as to its effects. The modern fictional writers, with little political motive, have shown us a man to be admired and emulated, whose “moral compass would not allow him to sail with the winds of expediency.”<sup>2</sup> It is, however, Savonarola’s treatment at the hands of earlier Italian authors which confirms that his after-history has, indeed, been strange and that what has been asked of him has been varied and demanding and even contradictory. It is his manipulation by writers who first dared to dream of a unified Italy to those who wrote during Mussolini’s

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Weinstein, ‘A Man for all Seasons: Girolamo Savonarola, the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation’, in *La figura de Jerónimo Savonarola O.P. y su influencia en España y Europa*, (Florence, 2004), pp. 3-21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

reign, that has left us in no doubt as to the importance of Savonarola's role in the creation of modern Italy. The influence of these writers in the making of Italy is impossible to assess. The fact that he was, and continues to be, called upon to realise Italy's destiny is a clear indication of the place he holds in the memory and in the imagination of Italians.

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